Treasure Trove

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BY

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To my
Aunts, Great-aunts, Aunts-in-law and Step-aunts
this book
is respectfully dedicated

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TREASURE TROVE

PART I

TREASURE TROVE

CHAPTER I

Mrs. Smart of The Laurels, Eastham, a suburb some dozen or so miles from Charing Cross, stood thoughtfully considering a small oblong package, wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. For some days it had lain on the dining-room mantelshelf, and it being her son's custom to pile the rubbish of his correspondence on that particular spot, she had not questioned its right to be there. That morning, however, as Willy was hastily finishing his breakfast she had lightly referred to it. She was a woman of method, used to tidying up after her men-folk, and if it were his, she would put it in his room. But Willy, deep in the morning paper, had shaken his head. He knew nothing about it; if it did not belong to his mother, he supposed that his sister must have left it there.

Mrs. Smart had let the subject drop, not because she had arrived at a solution of the small mystery, but because being naturally secretive, she would prefer to pursue her investigations when alone. The package was not Eva's, not hers, not her son's, so much she knew. To whom, then, did it belong? Who had left it there? She had lifted it when dusting, and had thus become aware of its unusual weight; and it now suddenly occurred to her that

whereas she had not noticed it before the night of the burglary, it seemed to have been lying on that corner of the mantel-shelf ever since.

People such as the Smarts, middle-class, hard-working, law-abiding, may admit the existence of a criminal class, but they think of it as something remote, something with which they cannot by any possibility be brought into contact. The dark deeds of which they read in newspapers and detective stories are merely a sauce with which to season their sense of snug security. Such things do not happen to everyday people living in the suburbs. A burglary in Eastham? Such a thing had not occurred within the memory of man, and that it should have taken place in a house, similar to all the other houses, thrilled the nerves of their owners. What had happened to one might happen to another! And not only the Smarts but their neighbours on each side, and up and down all the quiet roads, were disturbed and distressed by the thief's unexpected and, as it proved, futile visit.

For the Smarts had not suffered materially. The widowed mother, like most women who at some period of their lives have had their rest broken by infantile needs and demands, was a light sleeper; and the burglar could not have more than settled to his work when the succession of slight, unavoidable sounds which he made had disturbed her. Awake at once, she had sat up to listen, but the noises were faint, too faint for location. They

might have been the midnight creak of furniture, the scurrying of a mouse, the wind. They might have been, but Mrs. Smart had not thought that they were. Thrusting her feet into the woollen slippers which Eva had crocheted for her, she had gone to the door. Other ears were on the alert, however, and as she opened it, there was no mistaking the fact that somebody, driven by fear, was hastily beating a retreat.

Mrs. Smart had called her son, and together they had gone down to investigate. Willy, man-like, had been scornful of feminine alarms and excursions, and it was not until his candle had made darkness visible in the lower regions that he saw reason to change his opinion. The passage between the five rooms on that floor, a passage dignified by the name of hall, was much as usual, an empty place floored with oilcloth and hung with hats; but Mrs. Smart was wont before following her children upstairs to bed, to turn the keys of both dining and drawing-room, and the door of the former stood open.

"I know I locked it," she had murmured, as she and her son went cautiously forward. They were two, and being a person of stolid habit, she was not really afraid; but she had felt the menace of the dark, of the house given over for the night to unknown influences, of a familiar place seen under unusual circumstances. Willy had raised his candle as they stepped into the room, and she had then perceived that the burglar, by her long expected,

had really come and been disturbed and gone again, for the sideboard doors stood open and on the floor, neatly sorted into two lots, the one of electro, the other of plate, lay the family silver.

"The beggar can't have got far," Willy had exclaimed, his sense of possession outraged, his love of the chase aroused, and he had rushed out in quest of the marauder; but his mother, less impulsive, had lighted the gas and stopped to count over the precious things upon the floor. She had a good deal of silver, having inherited some from a grandmother, but more through her husband; and though she kept it in the dining-room sideboard, she had had the doors thereof fitted with strong and intricate fastenings. Every night the tea and coffee services, the rich plate basket and the drawing-room inkstand were brought to her by the maid of all work, and locked away. "It is as safe there as in my bedroom," she had said, being, for all her stout heart, a little afraid of the thief who cometh by night.

But it had not been safe, and when her son was come back from his fruitless chase of the burglar he had impressed this upon her.

"The man got in—and out—by the scullery window," he had said disgustedly. "The catch is broken and should have been seen to, but he has got clean away. If the night had not been so dark I would have tried to run him down." But his attire, pyjamas and a thick monkish dressing-gown,

grey and roped in, would hardly have allowed him to make the attempt. Mrs. Smart, motherly woman, had been secretly relieved to hear that the man had escaped. He had not taken so much as a spoon, and that being so, she bore him little malice. On the other hand, he might have been armed, might even, if the chase had been hot, have used his weapon. She had begun with careful fingers to collect the silver and restore it to its shelf in the old sideboard, and she went on with her work. It is not always wise to utter your thoughts.

Willy had watched her, but without offering to help. He was excited, even elated, by what had come to pass. For the first time he had caught a glimpse of what lay beyond the tame domesticity of his life, of strange worlds and stranger men. He was suburban-bred and city-bound, a clerk in a stock-broker's office, but his spirit responded to the call of the unusual. He felt, as he had so often before, that somewhere in the open, men were struggling with difficulties, facing dangers and enduring hardships, and that his place was with them rather than on a stool behind doors. But he was caught in the toils, a victim to his environment. He would never be able to shake himself free.

"To-morrow," he had said at last, putting his momentary sense of the possibilities of life on one side. "To-morrow I shall buy a safe; and anyway, it's foolish of you, Mother, to keep so many things in the house." He had bent down until he could

see the dark gleam of the silver where it lay at the back of the shelves. "Those candelabra and salvers and sauce-bowls and that other tea-service, we never use them and they might just as well be at the bank."

But Mrs. Smart would not hear of their being taken from her. Willy might set the police upon the burglar's track and waste money upon a safe, but she would cling to her silver, to the candle-cup which her grandmother had left her, to the thin, rat-tailed spoons with the Smart crest upon the handle, and all the other pieces big and little. They were hers, they would be her children's, and she liked to clean and polish them. If they were to be stored in the dark cellars of the bank it would hardly seem as if they belonged to her! So Willy, much against his better judgment, had had to give way. When morning came he had sought the help of the police, and they had done their best, but so far unavailingly. The burglar had become part of the night, unseen he had come and gone, leaving nothing by which he could be traced. For a moment he had troubled the quiet lives of Mrs. Smart and her children, and then he was gone again, no man knew whither.

The good woman's thoughts were full of him as, after seeing Willy off that morning, she turned back into the house. Was it possible that he had had anything to do with the heavy, knobbly package on the mantel-shelf? She called to Linda, the

general servant, as she went into the dining-room, and the girl followed her. She had been waiting to clear away the breakfast dishes.

"Do you know anything about this?" she asked casually, as Linda came round the table with her tray; and she touched the little parcel with a finger.

Linda was a Norwegian, a good and trustworthy girl with ambitions. She had come over to learn English ways, in order on her return to get a situation in a hotel. She did not like being away from home. She could not understand how anybody could live contentedly in such a flat, over-populated country as England, but she did her best to assimilate all the information she could. The waitresses in a Norwegian hotel who know English and the ways of English people do very well in the matter of tips.

"I tink it Mr. Willy's," said she composedly. She had that sad dignity of manner which is possessed by so many of her countrywomen, and which seems to come from a lifelong contemplation of the majesty and poverty, the cruel grandeur and the waste beauty of their native land.

"Then I must put it in his room," her mistress said. Instinct was impelling her along a road by no means strange. She picked up the parcel, and as she did so, caught the faint jingle and clink of displaced metal. Her interest deepened, but she felt that if that brown-paper wrapping contained anything of value, there was the greater need for

her to act with caution. As to combining that caution with straightforwardness and honesty, the idea did not so much as occur to her. Mrs. Smart's mental processes were dim as those of the contented tabby in the kitchen and did not include the stirrings and suggestions of conscience. Man has to become introspective before he can invent the postulates of good and evil. "I will do the marketing this morning," continued she, "and as Miss Eva will be home to-morrow, you had better get on with the cleaning of her room."

It was her custom to go herself to the shops, to choose the meat and vegetables for the evening meal, or if she were prevented, to send the carefully trained Linda. But before she could go out there was work to be done, beds to make and rooms to dust. The package in one hand, she went upstairs, and Linda, following her, saw her open her son's tie and collar drawer and put it inside. But Linda was scarcely interested. The concerns of the people with whom she lived were not her concerns. Before very long she would be going home, to forget all about them, and meanwhile she was, though perhaps not to outward seeming, preoccupied and indifferent.

The two worked together in silence until the bedrooms had resumed their daytime air of chill spotlessness, and then Mrs. Smart dressed and went out. She was a brisk and active woman of forty-six, and though weighing twelve stone, was as light on

her feet as her young daughter. She stepped smartly along the asphalted pavement, vaguely conscious of fresh air, sunshine and a bracing wind, for she enjoyed life, her own fine health, and all the interests of her solid position. Her income, though small, overlapped her expenses; her simple hopes were likely of fulfilment, and though her past had been troubled with more than one sorrow, her future promised fair. She was a comfortable, motherly woman, tall and of a good carriage, with bright dark eyes, dark hair and a warm colour. As she walked up the High Street, looking into the shop windows for what she wanted, selecting, appraising and bargaining, she seemed a model of her type—the self-respecting, thrifty, conventional English matron.

Good luck attended her shopping, for she presently obtained a bargain in the shape of a pheasant which the poulterer did not dare to keep any longer, while in one of the smaller green-grocers she chanced upon some belated mushrooms. She was an excellent cook and liked to make use of her skill. The pheasant, with potato soup to precede it and a mushroom savoury to follow, would make a toothsome meal for Willy after his long day at the office.

She came home jubilant, her purchases in a string bag at her side, and while unpacking them in the bright and cheery kitchen, was all loquacity and good humour. She told the tale of her chaffering

with the shopman, of how she had beaten him down and beaten him down, until he had agreed to take tenpence, yes, actually tenpence less, than he had asked at first. It was a hen bird, and hens were always the more tender; altogether she had a bargain. As to the mushrooms, they were buttons, hardly a big one among them. Finally she unrolled a cod's head, for which she had paid twopence. Willy should have fish cakes for his breakfast and she would get them ready overnight. It was a good big head, and only twopence. Linda might have some of it, there would be enough for all, and pickings for Peter, the cat.

Linda glanced at the clock, but her mistress averred that the midday meal was of no importance. The bit of steak left over from the preceding evening might be warmed up with the three cold potatoes that were in the larder, and a little of the brown gravy. But not too much. She would want some of it for her operations after tea. Was she then going to cook the supper? But certainly. Linda might help, might lay the cloth and prepare the breadcrumbs, but the triumph of the dainty meal must be hers, hers alone.

Mrs. Smart had married young and married well. She had been a handsome girl, and if she had cared to do so, might still have passed for a handsome woman; but after her husband's death the more masculine side of her character had asserted itself.

"I must be comfortable," she had said as she loosened her corsets, brushed back her fringe and provided herself with a pair of felt slippers. "I don't want to marry again, so why should I bother?"

And it was true that she did not wish to attract the notice and liking of the other sex. She had married for love, she had borne and brought up her children, and with the death of her husband that phase of her life had come to an end. In his grave she had buried her youth.

After her light luncheon had been discussed and cleared away Mrs. Smart went up to her room. Rising early, her afternoon nap had come to be almost a necessity, and certainly a comfort. In order to obtain it, she had outspokenly discouraged the early caller. She was at home after four, but she said quite frankly that before that she was either dressing or asleep. She had not many reticences, being at once too courageous and too simple to perceive the need for them.

On this particular afternoon, however, she did not go straight to her room. Linda was washing up in the scullery and the kitchen door was shut. The opportunity for her to repossess herself of the brown-paper package was come.

The Laurels was ten-roomed, with a bathroom abutting over the low-ceiled scullery, and beyond it four bedchambers, the servant's, Willy's, her own, and Eva's. The house faced west, and the afternoon

sun was already throwing a shaft of light in at the boy's window. With the foolish carefulness of the housewife, Mrs. Smart stepped noiselessly across the floor and lowered the blind. It might be true that the sun gave health, but it had been ascertained that it abstracted colour from hangings and carpets, and she preferred to stake her faith on the side of what was proven.

She stood for a moment to look about her. The narrow iron bedstead, the big new safe, the linoleum-covered floor, all spoke to her of her first-born and dearest child. It seemed like yesterday that she had furnished the room for him, and yet it was more than ten years ago. How quickly the children had grown up! She sighed as she reflected that it would not be long now before Willy would have a business of his own, before he would slip out from under her cherishing wing to become the husband and father in a new home. She had had three babies, one was lying with its father in the churchyard on the hill, and the others were man and woman. Alas for the flight of time and all that it took with it!

A black oak chest, old and carefully polished, stood on one side of the bed. Only the preceding week she had rubbed the dark wood until it shone, for she loved housework, loved to see her furniture gleam and to know that it was good. She took a drawer by the handle and it came smoothly towards her. Mrs. Smart's doors did not warp, nor her

drawers stick in their frames, for they had been made of seasoned wood and fed with a polish of which her mother had given her the recipe. She had the greatest contempt for what she called "modern stuff, gimcracks."

Where she had placed it, on the new dark-red tie which had been at the bottom of her boy's willingness to accompany her to church on the preceding Sunday, lay the small and heavy package. Mrs. Smart picked it up rather hastily, pushed the drawer gently to again, and went across the landing to her room. Only when her door was closed behind her did she feel safe, and even then she stood for a moment hesitating. It was unlikely that anybody would disturb her, but she would feel happier if she were absolutely secure. She had not locked her door since Willy was a baby; but now, after that momentary hesitation, she turned the key.

The package consisted of a stout paper bag, folded on itself and tied across with string. Feeling it carefully, she made out a number of lumps, the movement of which under her fingers gave out again, that faint metallic clink. Mrs. Smart jerked at the easy knot, but her hands were trembling with excitement, and she had to pause and pull herself together. At last the knot yielded, the bag fell open, and in an instant she had poured into the basin of her matronly lap a multitude of golden and glittering things.

CHAPTER II

THE circumstances of Mrs. Smart's life had been and were likely to continue narrow and circumscribed, but such as they were she was content with them. She stood on that rung of the social ladder which seemed to her the most desirable and convenient; and whenever she looked up or down, she did it pharisaically.

The jewels in her lap, however, made her envious. Such things were outside her life as they were outside her experience, for, strange as it may seem, she had never possessed a gem, and seldom seen one. On the rare occasions that she went to town, it was either on a shopping expedition to St. Paul's Churchyard or to the Haymarket Stores, and neither of these places took her through Bond Street. She was not a loiterer, she did not care to stand and gaze at shop windows, but went briskly about her business, and that accomplished, either finished the day by taking her children to a place of entertainment or returned to her suburban home. She knew nothing, therefore, of shops that cater for the wealthy, of the rare and beautiful objects with which they are filled, or of the sums which these may realise; and she had not hitherto suspected that flashing rainbowy things held for her any fascination.

Yet her first sensation as she tilted up the brown paper bag and beheld its contents, had been one of amazed but envious admiration. She had not pulled down the blind in her own room, and a broadening streak of sunlight lay across her knee. In it the confused mass of jewels winked and trembled in many-coloured glory, and the soul of the woman who had so strangely acquired it trembled too, but in a wonder and ecstasy which for the time being drowned all practical issues. With almost reverent fingers she disentangled a brooch from the glowing heap, a brooch valuable for its workmanship as well as for the diamonds and rubies with which it was studded. Bow-shaped, with two loops and two ends, it had been designed in France and worn at the court of Marie Antoinette. Between the ends hung a single pear-shaped pearl headed by a diamond, and the pearl, of a later date than the rest of the brooch, was slightly flawed. Mrs. Smart looked at it but without noting these details. For the moment she had forgotten her surroundings and was lost in a maze of light and colour and unimagined loveliness; but she was too ignorant to be critical. Who would have thought that the world contained red stones that could glow and white stones that could glitter like these? Not Araminta Smart, who knew nothing of pigeon-blood rubies and diamonds of the first water.

She moved the brooch to and fro in the warm light for some seconds, and then glanced hastily

about. The first ecstasy had given place to caution and she must assure herself that she was safe, that no human eye could spy out her treasures. But the imitation lace curtains met across the windows, the short muslin blinds were impervious to glances and the door was locked. She felt glad to think that she had put up the clean curtains without waiting another week. The others had sagged a little, had fallen apart, and anyone who had tried might have looked between them. But with these she felt absolutely secure.

Reassured, she bent forward and pushed aside a china tray, scent bottles and a ring stand. Such things were in Eastham considered appropriate to dressing-tables. Mrs. Smart had only two rings, wedding and keeper, and those she always wore; she never used scent; she had no powder to put in the painted china pots, and she liked, being a tidy woman, to keep her brush, comb and hairpins in the centre drawer of the dressing-table. So all these china objects, like the imitation lace curtains and the trim short muslin blinds, were merely part of the conventional detail of her days. They had no beauty and were of little use, save as an outward and visible sign of likeness to the common herd.

Having made a space on the white duchesse cover, Mrs. Smart set the brooch down and turned her attention to what remained. Beneath the bow had lain a sparkling but somewhat crushed piece of jewellery. This when released from the pins and

catching edges of some small brooches and straightened out upon her knee, proved to be a heavily set collar of sapphires. Not that she knew their name! To her they were merely stones of different colours, dark blue, light blue, green and white, four rows of them with, depending from the centre of the bottom row, five large misty gems—star sapphires. It was a beautiful ornament and very valuable, for the stones were brilliant, of a fair size and had been carefully matched. Mrs. Smart did not know this, but she felt that any one of these gems would be too large for her to wear in a ring, and here were—she guessed astutely—over a hundred, all large, all fine and set in one necklace. To this woman, inexperienced save in small domestic matters, who possessed for her greatest treasure a string of onyx beads and who had seen only the cheap trinkets of her neighbours, this superb ornament shone with an exaggerated lustre. Was there anybody who as a matter of everyday occurrence could clasp these rows of stones about her neck? Mrs. Smart thought of Eva's girlish throat, so round, so full, and tried to fancy it encircled by the collar. But no, the ornament would look out of place. It was too gorgeous for persons of her class. It belonged to those who could wear it as carelessly as she her beads, to people of whom she had read, whom she had even seen,—she on the pavement among the crowd and they in their carriages.

Beside the sapphire collar lay the three pieces

of a small jointed tiara. Mrs Smart connected them and laid them on the dressing-table, but they did not affect her as had the other ornament. The diamonds were of the first water, with a particularly fine one in the centre of each piece and the design was good. But she could more easily imagine these stones sparkling among Eva's dark locks, than she could fancy the regal-looking collar about her neck. She thought of the subscription dances, the first of which was to take place during the following week and of Eva in her pale pink frock. What a sensation she would create if she were to appear in the tiara. But no! Mrs. Smart knew her neighbours. There would be no sensation, there would be only disapproval and whispers of 'Parisian diamonds, imitation stones, modern paste.' Not for one instant would they believe the stones to be real. A diamond tiara on the head of a suburban girl at a subscription dance got up by the local dentist! Mrs. Smart did not know why, but she felt that it would be out of place. The other girls would wear trifling enamel pendants or tiny lockets, even their elders would only have a brooch or two of diamond cuttings or an ornament of seed pearls, or something old-fashioned but good, which had been handed down from mother to daughter. She heaved a little sigh. The tiara was so beautiful, the collar was beyond compare and the brooch—the brooch was a wonder and a strange delight; and yet these things were not for her or hers. For the first time in her

self-satisfied existence she came to a dim knowledge of joys that might be part of the complicated lives of the great, of joys which would not have been entirely alien to her. It must be a pleasure to own jewels, it must be a pleasure to wear them and a further pleasure to hand them on as she would hand on the rat-tailed silver and the old candle cup. The jewels had caught her up into the sisterhood of women, had made her one with all who in the past had loved the imprisoned light of gems, with all to whom it was a present joy, and with those as yet unborn but who in their turn must inherit the earth.

A few small brooches had been entangled with the collar and tiara, and these she now picked up and examined. A large opal heart, encircled with tiny rubies and emeralds, showed through misty green a centre of flame; beside it was a fine amethyst, the diamonds round which were set so low that their white light was flung up through the wine dark stone and beneath this was a small gold circlet inset with emeralds, emeralds of a wicked green that lay winking and blinking in the clear light of the sun.

One by one she put them down on the dressing-table, and when the last had been laid with its fellows, sat back to consider them. They were six in number, six ornaments which were valuable as well as beautiful. If their beauty had obsessed her for a few minutes, their value was an even more engross-

ing thought. For they were treasure trove! The burglar in leaving them behind had made of them a free gift. They were hers. She had found them and she would keep them. "Finding is keeping," said Mrs. Smart, with a confidence in the phrase which could hardly have been greater if she had been quoting one of the commandments. Not for an instant did she think of trying to find the rightful owner. The jewels had changed hands; and as she had found them, they belonged to her. And yet she was aware that her late husband would have thought differently. He was not one to take advantage of another man's carelessness, and he would have given up the find. To the police, however, not to the burglar! But Richard had always been different from other men and by other men his wife meant the men of her own class. For one thing he had never been able to understand that opportunities were for those who could grasp them. Mrs. Smart had lived with him for seventeen years but had never contrived to impress him with her point of view. He thought that it lacked honesty, while his, she was certain, lacked expediency.

"The woman who lost these," thought she, "must be a bit sorry for herself, but she'll have plenty of money, sure to, and can buy others." She could not imagine that the jewels had belonged to any but rich people, people to whom a loss of that kind was no great matter and who could easily make it good. In spite of her admiration for the

glittering objects spread out before her, she did not suspect that gems could be dear to the possessors, so dear that one stone can by no means take the place of another. Nor if she had would she have believed it. It did not suit her to be sympathetic, to dwell upon the loser's sufferings, or indeed to credit her with feeling more than simple annoyance, an annoyance at which she could afford to smile. The jewels had once no doubt belonged to some idle lady of the upper classes, and Mrs. Smart remembered, though somewhat tardily, that she did not approve of the upper classes. They were a good-for-nothing and immoral set of people. The thought of their lavishness,—wasting on trifles what would keep hard-working people for a week, a month, a year; of their irreligion—'desecrating the British Sabbath,' and of the looseness of their lives, tightened her mental grasp of the trove. She had been a poor woman in a small house who kept only one servant. She had hardly known the meaning of luxury and she had worked for what she had. Now, however, she saw herself against a background of great possessions, of innumerable precious stones all of which might be turned into money.

As for the money thus obtained, she would not spend it—no! She would not enlarge her expenditure by so much as a farthing. But if ever a crisis arose, if ever money were needed for Eva or for Willy, she—and her heart danced at the thought—

she would be able to provide it. She would have a secret hoard, a multitude of golden sovereigns, every one of which should be for the comfort and advancement of her children. She wondered what the jewellery was worth and what it would fetch and how she should dispose of it, conscious poor soul of her ignorance in such matters. She wanted to dream and to plan, but being a practical person, could only build her air-castles on solid mounds of fact, could only gild her visions with the gold of reality.

But what of the man who had left his package on her mantel-shelf? How was it that he had not returned to seek it? She was naturally unaware that in his hasty flight he had tripped, straining the arch of his foot, and yet she suspected that something of the sort might have happened. The rockery at the end of their garden held pitfalls for the unwary and the night had been dark. Climbing over into the road the man had dislodged one of the big clinkers and clinkers are heavy. She wondered if he had hurt himself and if that could be the reason that he had not come back. But the longer she sat with the jewels before her, the more certain did she feel of his eventual return. No one could abandon so valuable a possession without making an effort to retrieve it. He would come back, he who had already crept into her house when its inmates were asleep. He would come again, would find as the catch of the scullery window had been

mended, some other mode of entry, and she must be prepared for him. She was not a nervous person. Women who work hard and conscientiously from morning till night very seldom are. But there is no denying that to the feminine heart a burglar is a bugbear. He is not a mere man, he is an incarnation of night and fear and all the bogies created by imagination, a half ghostly, wholly terrible visitant. But Mrs. Smart was a woman of courage, and though her spirit trembled at the prospect of this man's return, she nerved herself to face the possibility.

When would he come? She and Linda were often alone together, two defenceless women in a detached house. No one to look at Mrs. Smart, broad and big and steady on her feet, could think of her as defenceless; it was not even her own view of herself. But capable as she was in everyday matters, she felt herself unequal to coping with a burglar, although—and the recollection of this was encouraging—he had certainly fled at the first creak of her opening door. When he came again, however, it would be in search of something more valuable than the silver in the old sideboard, something too precious to be abandoned without strenuous effort; he would be suspicious, suspicious and perhaps angry. Mrs. Smart sighed. She wished that burglaries were committed during the hours of daylight. It was so much easier to deal with people and events when the sun was shining and the sweet

air blowing through the morning windows. "As a thief in the night," she murmured. She felt that she would be facing fearful odds; but though afraid, she knew she would face anything rather than lose her treasure trove. Not for a moment did she think of surrendering it. She would as soon have given the man an open cheque. What she had acquired was hers—if she could keep it; and at that a slow smile dawned upon her face. The man? Yes, after all he was only a man, and she, she was the mother of such. Women spoil men, flatter them, give them their own way, and are yet contemptuous of them. How can they honour what, in helpless and naked infancy, they have held in their arms? From birth to manhood and from manhood to old age, the woman has cared for them, borne with them and comforted them, cooked and mended and advised, surrounding them with her providence, smiling at their foibles, forgiving their weaknesses. Honour? The wise old cleric who inserted it into the marriage service forgot that a shell need not necessarily contain a fish! So, to Mrs. Smart, the burglar stripped of his cloak of crime, stood revealed as but a man; and seeing him thus, her courage returned to her.

She must hide her trove, must remember that the man who would rob her of it was no ordinary person with clumsy fingers and an unimaginative mind, but someone used to the ways of the human creature with its treasure. She knew women who hid things

under their mattresses, knew others who put their faith in locked drawers and boxes, and yet others who made use of the tops of wardrobes. Men, of course, sent their valuables to the bank, or shut them into despatch boxes and safes, or, stranger still, left them with their solicitors. But she would do none of these things, "for," thought she, "if I know of these hiding places, a burglar will be aware not only of them, but of many more."

Willy, the day after the burglary, had spent his savings on a large and heavy safe, and now every evening the silver, to the last spoon, was brought up to his bedroom and locked away. It was almost a function. Mrs. Smart carried the plate basket, Linda her tray laden with softly gleaming objects, and the young fellow, the dignity of the householder in his manner, received and locked everything away. But it was the mother who kept the keys, just as it was she who was the real householder; and it was she who stole into the boy's room every morning to get out what was needed. She did not believe in safes. They shewed where the treasure lay, and were in themselves a temptation, and she was at least certain that wheresoever she might place her valuables, it would not be in Willy's new dark-green toy.

She turned in her chair and looked about the bedchamber, considering its resources and anxious to be very wise, wiser than the burglar. It was a room akin to others in the vicinity, a solidly fur-

nished uncomfortable shelter, in which a woman might clothe and unclothe herself, might rise up in the morning and lie down at night, in which she might sleep—but could not live. In the centre, its head against the wall, stood a fourposter which was trimmed with chill white dimity. The one window was heavily curtained, and for further protection a walnut wood dressing-table stood before it like a barricade. Facing this on the other side of the bed was a wardrobe of the Chippendale period, while a washstand stood on one side of the grey stone mantel-shelf and a chest of drawers on the other. The grate was old-fashioned. Never in the coldest weather did Mrs. Smart treat herself to a fire in it, and as a consequence, while the fireplaces in dining- and drawing-rooms and study were modern, while the kitchener was spoken of respectfully by every matron who had been privileged to inspect it, the grates in the bedroom story of the house were of an ancient and unpretentious kind. Mrs. Smart glanced at the well-blackened bars. In the chimney, as she happened to know, were one or two jutting bricks; how if she were to conceal the packet upon one of these, under a generous layer of soot? But no. For years her chimney had been clean of soot, and its sudden appearance on one of the tiny ledges would only engender suspicion. It was evident that she could not make use of the chimney.

Before this she had often kept trifles at the back

of her brush and comb drawer, slipping them behind the newspaper that lined it, and this hidey-hole came in for consideration. But it was probable that other women did the same, and in the end she shut the drawer to with sudden sharpness. She had thought of a plan.

On her mantel-shelf was the usual clock flanked by two green vases of cheap majolica. Beyond and sufficiently similar to please their owner's type of mind lay two boxes, one containing Mrs. Smart's few and valueless trinkets, and the other two bundles of letters. The good woman's attention had fixed itself upon the second of these boxes. A matchwood copy of a Swiss chalêt, she had used its dusty prettiness to hold the few epistles she had cared to keep, letters from her children, and some written to her before they were born, before she was ever married; letters the ink of which was a little faded, like the love it voiced, the love which had been so young and fierce and careless of obstacles, that it had made a man of good family marry a farmer's daughter and settle for life in Eastham!

She took down the box and lifted out its contents, two bundles tied across with string. One of these she laid aside. Practical as she was, the sight of them brought back the atmosphere of long ago, of honeysuckle and wild roses, with the vision of a couple strolling through shaded lanes, one never to be forgotten summer. Her husband's letters were

sacred, but no such sentiment hovered over Eva and Willy's. They lay in a large, somewhat soiled envelope, across which in her pointed old-fashioned hand she had written: "Letters from the children." This she deliberately emptied, and going to her store of writing and packing materials, got out some unbleached cotton wool. She did not enjoy returning the gems to the darkness out of which they had sprung, and her fingers moved reluctantly as she folded first one piece and then another in the brown refuse. When they had been made into a flat parcel, she slipped them into the old envelope and tied it across with the piece of string which had been used before. To all outward seeming it was the same bundle of letters which she had taken out of the box, and she smiled hopefully over its innocent appearance. Who would suspect it of being anything but letters? She put it back into the Swiss chalêt—a present from the children upon one of her birthdays—and it filled the same space as before. It had lain in the box for so many years that it had made a square mark upon the lining of red velvet, and it now once more exactly fitted onto the piece of pressed pile. The wood of the chalêt was warped and the roof would not quite close. Mrs. Smart put the packet of her husband's letters in above the other envelope, and shutting down the lid stood it back in its place. Who would think that this half-open flimsy box left casually on the grey mantel-shelf contained precious stones? Not

Linda when she came to dust, not—Mrs. Smart hoped—the burglar, if he were to return.

Her children's letters, early ones in the round-hand of the beginner, stiff schoolboy epistles dealing with stamps and cakes and coin, and later, more mature effusions, lay in an untidy pile on the dressing-table. She took down the other box and lifted out its little tray. Beneath were her string of onyx beads and some odds and ends of treasured rubbish, a broken buckle, a pair of links, and some old-fashioned studs. These things she conveyed to the back of her brush and comb drawer; and then, gathering up the letters, she laid them in the well of the trinket-case. They had been pressed together for so long that they took up little room; and with a feeling of satisfaction and relief, Mrs. Smart presently restored the box to its place. All looked as usual. For the last ten years the clock, the two jars and the boxes had stood in their present positions, and they had come to have an air of permanence, of having grown in their places, and of being very humble. It could not be that any one of them concealed a secret of importance, a secret to which the others were accessory. They were so cheap, so commonplace, so lacking in mystery. Even Mrs. Smart as she drew back and surveyed the work of her hands felt for a moment as if the experiences of the afternoon had been unreal, a dream of riches which must vanish if she sought to establish it.

CHAPTER III

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,
Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.
OMAR KHAYYAM.

A BELL rang in the silent house and Mrs. Smart, who had just cast a longing eye towards that side of the bed on which she was wont to take her afternoon nap, sighed impatiently. Her ears told her that it was the front-doorbell, and she knew she should have been ready for callers. She began hastily to unbutton her morning dress. The women who came to see her were seldom congenial, but she was comfortably unaware of it. They represented houses, houses to which Eva and Willy might be invited; therefore she made them welcome and sent her daughter to return their calls. They were women made after the ephemeral fashion of to-day, she after that of yesterday and to-morrow, and as a consequence they were vaguely pleased to see Eva in her mother's stead. Not, however, that Mrs. Smart was without her own kind of social relaxation. She had certain friends, cronies who dropped in occasionally for a gossip and whose talk was strictly human and natural. Every now and then, when the preserves were all made, the house from

loft to scullery a model of cleanliness, and she had come to a breathing-space, she would return their visits, thoroughly enjoying the shrewd feminine talk of servants and children, neighbours and housekeeping, and coming back refreshed and full of news.

The caller presently resolved herself into a lazy errand boy, who, being new, had thought he might bring his parcels to the front door, a mistake which Linda, with awe-inspiring dignity, had pointed out. Nothing abashed, he went whistling on his way, but Mrs. Smart, though relieved to hear the clash of the latch as the gate swung to behind him, continued her simple toilet. After all it was nearly time for tea, quite time for her to change into her brown stuff dress, to smooth her already smooth hair, and fasten round her neck and in at the centre button of her bodice the long gold watch chain that she habitually wore. Mrs. Smart's gowns were few and inexpensive. If the material were good and Eva did not object, she bought what the shop girls recommended. And Eva, though she knew so much better than her mother, was a gentle tyrant. Unless her sense of colour—that of the average person—were outraged, her parent might buy what she liked and wear it when she chose.

Mrs. Smart's tea of toast and dripping was to her liking, so much so that she lingered over it, thinking of her find and all that it might mean to Eva and Willy. She did not think that she would

speak of it to them. They were still the children, and she had never yet discussed her monetary affairs with them. They did not know the amount of her yearly income, how much of it she spent, or what she did with her savings. She might have had thousands lying idle at the bank, or she might have overdrawn her account. They knew nothing, and she preferred to keep them ignorant. For the moment she could not see how she was going to dispose of the jewels, but she felt no real anxiety on that score. It was enough that she had them.

As she dawdled over her second cup of tea, her thoughts went straying back into the past. The buoyancy of her disposition led her to remember the successes rather than the failures of her life, and she thought of herself as having always been happy, almost always lucky. Her earliest memories were of a house in a terrace, a town house; of morning walks with her mother, and evening romps with her father. While hardly more than a baby, however, the London home had been broken up and her parents had taken a small farm in the country. Her memories of that period were dim, and she paused to wonder whether both her parents had come down to the farm, or whether it had been then that her father had gone abroad. She supposed that the London business, whatever it was, had proved unequal to their support and that he had gone to look for other more paying employment; but she could not remember when he had gone or for how long he

had been absent. Her first years in the country had absorbed her attention to such an extent that the brooding presences which protected her tiny life had been almost forgotten. Whether he had gone then or later, however, there had certainly been a time when he was absent and when the management of the farm had devolved upon her mother. It could not have devolved upon more capable shoulders. Mrs. Lovell's chickens, eggs, milk and butter were excellent, and her customers could depend upon her. She was before the time of chicken farms and model dairies, but having a Dutch ideal of cleanliness, and some commonsense, she managed, as the pioneer so often does, to make her venture pay. Mrs. Smart could recall the taste of the home-cured hams and pickled pork, of the home-grown vegetables and the wholemeal bread. She had been a healthy, merry child, tramping her mile to school whatever the weather or the time of year, and running back famished. How good had been the smell rising from the big pot over the fire, the pot in which her mother always put the stew for the evening meal. The seasoning had been garden herbs and hunger and surprise, for the stew was never the same. Sometimes it contained dumplings, dumplings soaked through and through with rich gravy; sometimes there were tender young carrots and a rabbit which Mrs. Lovell had snared, and on red-letter days there was chicken, elderly but none the less chicken. Mrs. Smart saw herself again, a rosy,

wind-blown little girl, hurrying across the kitchen to the dresser. On it, always in its own place, stood a yellow bowl banded with blue, her own bowl; and into it her mother would ladle some of the fragrant stew. She would give the child a slice of bread and a spoon and send her to her stool by the fire, and for a long time there would be silence and enjoyment, a tired little body taking in sustenance preparatory to the night-long sleep, and a woman gladdening her eyes with the sight of a hunger which she could satisfy.

One never to be forgotten day the husband and father had come back. The child had found him when she ran in on her return from school, a quiet man in a blue serge suit. She had been almost deliriously glad to see him, it was so great an event and he had been so charming a playmate. She had not forgotten him in the least. But to her disappointment he seemed to have grown too old for romping. Instead he would sit by the fire watching his wife as she moved about, and seemingly content that she should continue to manage the farm. His little daughter had been puzzled. Had he been ill in the places where he had been, and was he come home to get well? But he assured her that this was not so. Before very long, however, he had fallen ill in good earnest; and in a short time—in a moment as it had seemed to her—he was dead. Mrs. Smart could remember her mother leading her into the familiar bedroom that she might say good-bye

to him. She had wept and wept, but her mother had stood there with a grim look upon her face and never a tear. The child had felt as if they two were talking, the dead man through his closed lips, the live woman wordlessly; and as if she and her simple grief were forgotten. She did not remember her father's face, the weak face with its look of unavailing regret, but she could still hear her mother's " Poor soul! " as she had turned away, her hand still close about the little hand of her child.

For several years after her father's death the still pool of their lives had been untroubled by any event of moment. The farm had prospered, the little girl had passed from one class to another, until the last day of school life had dawned and closed. The time that followed was full of the sweet triumphs of youth. She had been good-looking, with soft eyes and an abundance of dark hair, and when the lads smiled at her she had felt pleased and had smiled back again. But her smiles had meant nothing until Richard Smart came to convalesce at the farm after an illness, to loiter by the gravelled shallows of the stream that twinkled through their fields, and to fall in love with his landlady's daughter. At that time she was in her twentieth year, innocent and love ripe, a peach on a southern wall, and what more natural than that the man should stretch out a desirous hand. Mrs. Lovell with her grim acceptance of all that time brought to her door, had looked on but had not interfered. Minty must marry, and

if this man rather than another, so be it; but it was a pity, oh yes, it was a pity.

For Richard was the sixth and youngest son of Sir Jocelyn Smart, a county magnate, and Mrs. Lovell had her own reasons for deprecating alliances between gentle and simple. Not that she raised objections; she left that to the young man's family, and they quite fulfilled her expectations. Sir Jocelyn was an old-fashioned parent, and he proved it, as one of his sons said, by "kicking up a devil of a rumpus"; while the mother, who could not bear to see her youngest-born slipping out of an already lonely life, had wept and implored. But Dick was in love and, for once in his life, knew what he wanted.

How swiftly their marriage had followed upon his declaration of love! The wild roses of the lanes in which they wandered had hardly had time to shed their petals before she was choosing furniture for the little suburban home, the home in which she had been so happy. Her husband was in the Labour Department of the Board of Trade. To the surprise of those who knew the hard-riding, hard-hitting, daredevil Smarts, he had enlivened a delicate boyhood by winning a variety of prizes and exhibitions. Another father would have been as proud of him as Lady Smart was, but the squire damned him for a bookworm and talked of "men."

The lad's schoolmasters had united in promising him a brilliant future—he who after his schooldays

was never to taste success—his mother had hoped to see her ugly duckling whiten into a swan, and Minty had begun her married life with that "honour" for him upon which the church insists. But Richard Smart was a "dreamer with no dreams to dream"; he had very little initiative and only nebulous ambitions. His personality was gentle and charming, but it did not impress, and he shrank from battle. Not his to rush into the arena, push his way past other men and grasp at the spoils of the vanquished.

Mrs. Smart had been disappointed in him, but after some years of failing hope, had readjusted her expectations. His was not the commercial brain and he would never make a fortune. Very well, then, she would not look for worldly success. Her husband was clever, a great linguist, and she could be proud of having married so gifted a man. It was by this adaptability that she contrived content, and kept her smile sincere. Looking back, however, she forgot that she had ever known a pang of disillusion. Richard had been unfailingly good to her, and she remembered only the golden hours. The neighbourhood of Eastham in those days consisted chiefly of wood and heath and common, and in summer evenings they had gone for long rambles over the downs or, when the children were coming, had sat on a fallen tree in the copse nearest their little home, listening to the nightingales. It was of such moments that she thought.

For Richard had been only too kind, too cour-

teous. The men Minty had hitherto met had had workaday wives and workaday manners, and she could not bring herself to take his strange and charming ways as a matter of course. When he held the door open for her, she hurried past with her head down, ashamed to keep a tired man on his feet when she could so well have turned the handle for herself. When she realised that he would not sit down if she were standing, it made her feel uncomfortable and as if she must remain glued to her chair. In the end, although she took a secret pride in knowing him so different from his fellows, she had remonstrated. "Oh don't," she had said, seeing him about to rise and wait on her, "men don't do that for their wives."

The couple, quiet, inoffensive, and in the blossoming time of their youth, had been called upon by the people in the adjacent houses, simple folk who made the most of their tiny incomes, and thought themselves daringly unconventional if they ventured to wheel out their own babies, instead of sending them with the one servant, and staying at home to do the housework. Minty took to the suburban life, wore her best clothes on Sunday, did her own marketing, and otherwise demeaned herself as to the manner born, but Richard stumbled and made mistakes. He could not understand that you went to church in order to shew that you had good clothes. He wanted to go in a lounge suit, as he and his brothers would have done at the Priory. But when

he appeared in it, his wife had gazed at him in horror, a horror by no means simulated. "You must wear a frock coat and a tall hat and light kid gloves," she had said, and from thenceforward he had followed suburban usage.

He meant well. He was a working bee and he realised that the idle glory of the drones was not for him, that he must live as did the other workers. Just at first, however, the tiny differences were difficult to bear in mind, difficult because, as it seemed to him, they were so unimportant.

All his grown-up life he had dressed for dinner and he saw no harm in the habit, but his wife did. "When we are *alone?*" she had asked, seeking in vain to make him see that he owed a greater courtesy to the stranger who might dine with them than to herself.

He hardly understood what she was trying to say, and in his turn explained that it would be as uncomfortable to spend the evening in fusty workaday clothes as to go without his morning tub. Mrs. Smart had smiled and given way. He might change but he must not dress. "Wear an old suit. Then you can work in the garden, and if any of the neighbours drop in for a pipe, they won't think you are putting on side."

So Richard Smart carefully relearnt his manners. The men he met in Eastham or going up to business were good fellows enough. They did not look at things quite as he did, but at first he had found that

rather amusing. It was only as he grew older that he began to miss the atmosphere in which he had been reared. He would have liked his boys to have had a better education than Eastham could give them, he would have liked them to have met their young cousins and gone to Rugby—the family school—and he would have liked his pretty Eva to have made her début under his mother's wing. But these things could not be. He had chosen his place and his lot and he must make the best of them.

Not that he regretted his choice. Minty—her name was Araminta—cheerful, thrifty, and self-confident, was the right wife for a man of his nervous temperament; and though he never told her all that was in his mind, at least he made her happy. In the class to which by birth he belonged, only courage and good manners were expected from women. They had servants to wait on them, husbands and fathers to protect them, they were cherished, guarded and indulged. Richard not having learnt to differentiate, supposed his wife would prove as helpless as his sisters; and Mrs. Smart, capable, healthy, and a manager, was astonished to find herself treated like a rare exotic. It took her years to make him realise that she knew the value of money as well if not better than he did, that housework was not distasteful to her, and that she really enjoyed the society of her children. Till the day of his death her ways seemed to him beautifully strange and unusual, and that in spite of an occasional dif-

ference of opinion. But their quarrels, quarrels due to her impatience and his sensitiveness, were of no importance and sprang up only to wither away.

For the first few years of their married life they had felt the pinch of poverty, a pinch which he bore with equanimity, but for which he was always mentally apologising to her. His salary was small, salaries sometimes are in the Home Civil, and Richard Smart thought more of doing his work conscientiously than of trying to obtain a living wage. Some day he would be recompensed for his long and faithful service, but he could not ask. He would rather have gone without. However, the big rise eventually came, lifting the tiny income to four hundred a year, and Minty's pride in her husband was renewed. Nor had destiny finished with them. A week later old Sir Jocelyn died, and his death brought a further amelioration of circumstances.

Mrs. Smart had been dressing for church and from her bedroom window had seen a landau and pair drive up to the gate. The road had been full of their neighbours, of people who did not know that Richard was the son of a baronet, but who could not help observing this disturbance of the Sunday peace. Mrs. Smart, deeply gratified, but a little fluttered, had hurried down. Were her husband's people going to recognise her at last? She had been ten years married, and during all that time no word had come from Sir Jocelyn or his wife, or indeed from

any of the family except William, the brother next in age to her husband. She ran into the dining-room where her children—three in those days—were awaiting her, and heard that "Daddy had gone to the door."

It was like him to have made no more of the matter than that. She herself would have observed a due formality, but then she had not all her life been used to men servants and maid servants, carriages and horses. For once she saw her husband, not as the dear domestic friend, but as a Smart of Smarden Priory, and seeing him thus, was amazed at her temerity in having married him.

Richard on opening the door had recognised the man. "Why Forbes," he had said kindly, "and so you are still there. How is my mother?"

Forbes, grimly important, had told him that her ladyship was in the carriage; that she had come for him, Sir Jocelyn being very ill.

To Mrs. Smart's surprise, her husband on the receipt of this information had seemed to forget everything but his mother and the past. Snatching up a cap he had run out to the carriage.

"My poor mother—that you should have come yourself," he had cried.

"He has only the one wish now," his mother had said pathetically. "He wants to see you and make amends," and Richard had straightway stepped into the carriage and driven away with her.

Mrs. Smart never knew in detail the events of

that day, was never told how father and son had met.

"Well, Dick," the old man had said, "lying here I've thought it over and I see that you had the right to choose. I'm death on misalliances, always have been, but I treated you unfairly. I can't say more than that."

"No sir," and the hands met, the one rough with outdoor work, the hand of a man fond of manual labour, and the other white and fine and smooth —but for all that, hands very similar in shape.

"Has it answered, Dick?"

"In some ways. My wife's the one woman in the world for me, but I'm out of my element. The people are all right, but they aren't the people I've been used to, and it's the same with the life." He glanced round the large airy room and out of the open window. Smart land ran from the big Tudor house to the distant horizon, a fat and pleasant piece of the broad earth. "I ought not to have been brought up here," he added simply.

His father nodded. "That's where the pull comes, eh? Well, boy, I've left you a share, but the property is mostly entailed, and I hadn't much to play about with. Got any children?"

Richard named and described them. "Eva and Jocelyn are like their mother, but Willy is a Smart."

"A Smart? Pity. Well, stick him in a regiment and send him out into the world. He won't be happy in your suburb."

"I wish I could have got into the service," the other said, voicing a lifelong regret.

"The medicos wouldn't have passed you for it."

"No, and yet I should have made a good soldier —routine work and no responsibility and an outdoor life."

"A man's life," murmured the old man. "Ah, Dick, after all you're a Smart. Never a damned woman among 'em, all boys, Dick, all men."

A prejudiced old gentleman this, one who clung to his prejudices and would take them with him through the gates of death.

Those few hundreds a year which Sir Jocelyn left him raised the load of responsibility from his son's breaking back. A delicate man, Richard had brooded unhappily over the future of his wife and children, and that was now assured. He might even have said good-bye to the Labour Department of the Board of Trade! His wife had suggested it, wondering as she did so what she would do if she had him at home all day. But the years had brought him a little wisdom. He thought of his room in London and his pleasant work—the writing of letters in every European language, the reading of innumerable foreign newspapers, in order to extract from them all that related to the affairs of his department, and he shook his head. In London he occasionally saw other men who, like himself, had slipped off the ladder, had climbed down instead of up, men who talked and thought as he did, who

went to the old shops for their ties, and if they could have afforded it, would have gone to the old tailors for their clothes. He was happy in his office, happier than he could ever now be elsewhere, and he would not give it up.

After some years of comparative affluence, during which the family moved out of its side street into a house on the main thoroughfare, and were called upon by suburban ladies a little higher in the social scale than those whom they had hitherto known, Richard Smart died. He had never been strong, and once pneumonia had him in its grip there was little hope. Again the big landau and pair drove up to the gate, but this time a tired old woman who had buried her husband and several of her many children, crept out of it. Mrs. Smart met her on the doorstep and as

> The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady
> Are sisters under the skin—

they kissed when they met.

"Is he——?" asked the mother, unable to put her fear into words. Pneumonia can do its work rapidly, and Richard would not have sent for her unless he had been near the end of the journey.

"He spoke of you just now. He asked for you," answered the other, giving out of her maternal heart what comfort she could.

So with those whom he loved about him, Richard Smart had closed his eyes upon a puzzling world.

He had been dealt with strangely and he had never understood. It is possible that Nature in her indifferent way had used him as she uses so many of us, for the good of the race, and of course he had not understood.

His death had taught the woman who thought herself so lucky the meaning of sorrow. "Ah, but in time," she had said, "in time I shall forget." But summer faded into winter and came again, and the empty chair remained empty, the poor heart cried after its lost companion.

"He told me that I should get over it," she had said, clinging to the skirts of hope, "that I should get used to being without him; but I don't, I miss him more every day, more and more and more."

She was bewildered by the insistency of her grief. "It is as if I had lost a part of myself—an arm," she said. "It does not hurt now, but it is still lost and I can never have it back again." But hers was a healthy spirit in a healthy body, too healthy for exaggerated or long continued sorrow. Two of her children yet remained to her, and labouring for them, she could at times forget her loss. Once more as they grew to man and womanhood she tasted happiness, the happiness of one who waits for she knows not what, and while waiting fills her time with work.

The children were satisfactory. They seemed to have been cut on the ordinary pattern, and for this she had the sense to be thankful. To be common-

place among the commonplace was what, though she hardly phrased it so, she wished for them. Richard had been clever, and what had it brought him? The joys of the outcast, not of the outcast among outcasts, but of the outcast in the wilderness.

Willy, though good at figures, had no leanings towards any particular occupation. When asked what he wanted to do he had said "Something abroad," but had not seemed capable of elaborating this idea. His mother had suggested a bank in Hong Kong, but he did not think he would like to be a clerk or to stay in one place for very long, and after mentioning one thing after another, and finding none of them to his taste, she had finally lost patience and put him into a stockbroker's office. Willy had accepted his fate with equanimity. "I shall make money," he had said, "and then I shall be able to do as I like."

"If you only knew what that was you could do it now," his practical mother had rejoined.

"But that's just it, I don't know. There must be something I should like to do, and presently perhaps it will come to me. Of course I'd like to travel."

Mrs. Smart had shaken her head. "Too expensive and a waste of time. You've got to work for your living, and the sooner you begin the better."

"That brings us back to where we were before. I'll try and make money, and when I've made it I shall be able to do as I like," and he had smiled

at her, a quick, bright smile that reminded her of his uncle, Colonel William Smart. Willy with his rippled black hair, his grey-black flinty eyes and his fine physique was a Smart, but he resembled his uncle rather than his father. Mrs. Smart, who admired her husband's folk and thought deprecatingly of the little farm at Ashwater and the sturdy old woman who managed it, could have wished that Eva had not been a mere younger likeness of herself. Once and once only had she seen the Evangeline—her husband's mother—after whom the child had been named; but the elegant and fragile lady, though broken by sorrow, had made on her mind an indelible impression. Her pale colours, her scarcely rounded contours, her slender grace, had seemed admirable to the woman whom life had used and poverty abused. If Eva had only resembled her grandmother! But Eva herself was content to be like the mother whom she loved with sweet and girlish warmth, to be dark-eyed and rosy-cheeked and sonsie. The pale aristocrat, with the fine snow-white hair, and thin long features, had had no charms for her. If she ever thought of her it was in connection with that saddest day her young life had as yet experienced, the day on which her father had died, and on which she had seen Lady Smart sitting on one side of the bed, his hand in hers. Like that fine cold unhappy woman? Eva could not see her beauty, and had not the least wish to resemble her. "No, Mummie dear, I'd rather be

like you; at least you are alive, and Grandmother Smart did not look as if she were or had ever been."

Twilight had fallen, the teapot had grown cold and Mrs. Smart returning from her stroll down "the long street of memories" found that it was growing late.

She pushed back her chair and rose, a tremulous smile on the corners of her mouth. "Ah, but I have been a lucky woman," she told herself as the figures of her parents, her husband and her children flitted across her mental vision. Ah, yes, the dear ones, those whom she still had and those to whom across the grave she stretched hands of loving memory. She was one of those whose dead cannot know corruption, for they only sleep. A faithful heart.

CHAPTER IV

MEANWHILE the man who had left the jewels behind when fear sent him flying out of The Laurels was, as Mrs. Smart had surmised, very much annoyed at their loss. He had not discovered it until he reached his home, one of the small old-fashioned houses in Camberwell Grove; and when he realised it, he had been too angry to speak about it. Tom Tharp was a reporter, a pleasant little fellow with limpid blue eyes and a vivacious manner. He had the good fortune to be on the *Times,* a fact which was known to all the policemen in his neighbourhood, and which made them accept the irregularity of his hours with equanimity; while as to the black bag without which he never left his home, had they not seen it bulging with documents of an innocent description? Had he not casually opened it before them to find a theatre pass which he could not use? The little man was popular, he had a way with men, and once, when he had been in sore straits, he had found that women too would dance to his piping. He had since married the heroine of that adventure, the woman who could have given him in charge, but who had not done so. Knowing him for what he was, accepting it as a fact of nature and leaving it at that, she had become the only possible wife for him.

What was he? Gutter-snipe to begin with, Board school child, office boy, clerk, reporter, father of a family, respectable citizen! More too, for he had the long hand and blunt finger-tips which go with dexterity and imagination.

The little man was a survival. In him burnt the spirit of high adventure, of some thievish Norse viking who, when the restlessness came upon him, must set the nose of his long-ship towards England and come after the goods of unoffending Saxons. A degenerate descendant of these rough fighters, Tom Tharp used craft where they had been content with strength, but he had the same greed of gain, the same moral carelessness. It is hardly imaginable that the viking when he sat at home surrounded by comforts which he had taken with the strong hand had any qualms of conscience; and Tharp, living, unfortunately for him, in a more delicate and finicking age, was yet as happily constituted.

Like the Norse freebooter, he could endure spells of monotonous labour. For weeks he would return home by the usual train, play with the children, smoke his pipe, and go early to bed, but the undercurrent of adventurous desire would be rising all the time. His wife had learnt to recognise the symptoms, the on-coming dreaminess, the irritation, the disinclination for society. At last the plan, whatever it was, upon which his brain had been working, would be mature. "Don't expect me home early,"

he would say one morning as he kissed her good-bye. "There's extra work on at the office."

Florence, who asked no questions, had accepted the formula. She knew that when he returned it would be with the black bag grown comfortably heavy, and that for days after he would go singing and whistling about the house. "Some people," he had once said to her, "can look down at the carpet and see only grey threads, and yet not mind, but I want pattern and colour. I was made that way."

Florence Tharp had been lady's maid at a big house, and one evening she had found Tom hard at work on a safe in her mistress' bedchamber. She had stood, boldly, for those she represented, but she had not raised the alarm. He must not take so much as a farthing's worth, but he might go. And he had had sufficient wit to appreciate both her generosity and her loyalty. He would go, but he would come back, for he wanted to see her again. She was a fine-looking girl, fair, stolid and slow, and in the end he had, as she expressed it, "worried her into taking him."

They were oddly congenial. His active brain needed just the home atmosphere, quiet and peaceful, which she created, while she found his foolish gaiety, his high spirits and the comforts which he provided, very pleasant. Their children, two boys, were sharp little fellows with the fair beauty of the mother and the clamorous vivacity of their other

parent. Tharp was extremely proud of them. He meant to give them a good commercial education and hoped one day to see them successful as financiers. They would of course inherit his tendencies, feel in their turn the sharp-edged joy that was his whenever he managed to outwit a fellow-man; and he would contrive that they should be able to do it on a larger scale than had ever been possible for him. The little chaps trotting every morning to their kindergarten, but not yet old enough for the Camberwell Grammar School or Dulwich College, were to him millionaires in embryo, successful pirates, Norse freebooters translated into modern life. He bought biographies, the lives of monied rascals, of great conquerors, of empire builders; and when he was not planning a burglary, steeped himself in the stories of their stupendous wickedness. The world acclaimed them great, and he recognised his far-off kinship with them. They had grasped at gold and lands, using the lives of men, as women use thread for their work; and he, in his small way, was putting out his hand and grasping, careless of the consequences.

But the jewels, the jewels that he had left behind! Tharp habitually used a bicycle, and when paying a night visit to some house beyond the three-mile radius, rode out and back. He would leave it, for the time being, inside a walled garden abutting on the road, or behind the house itself in some convenient shadow, and when ready would return, lift

it over or out and wheel away. On the night that he had raided The Laurels he had left his machine in the back garden of a neighbouring house; and having hurt his foot among the rockwork as he made his escape, had had some difficulty in regaining it. He was not easily beaten however, and after a time succeeded in getting it back into the road, whence, pedalling with one foot, he had made his way home. But he had been really hurt, and was confined to his room for some weeks, during which period of enforced inaction he was able to spend as much time as he liked reflecting upon his amazing folly. That he of all people should have done this thing! He was vain of his dexterity and forethought, of the care with which he laid and executed his plans, and yet it was he, Tom Tharp, who had taken jewels worth several thousand pounds out of his bag and put them on a strange mantel-shelf while he set about filling it with silver, mere silver; and who when disturbed had hurried off without them. For some days after the event he kept silent about it, but in the end he made a confidante of his wife.

"To think I should have been such a gol-darned ass," he said.

Mrs. Tharp slowly revolved the matter. "It was wasteful," she said at last, "I could have done with that necklace myself."

"I wonder what's happened to it?" her husband said restlessly. "I've looked in the papers, but

there's been never a word. I thought I should have seen 'Sensational Discovery! The biter bit. Burglar leaves Lady Dudley Bodger's jewels in the dining-room of another house.' But no, not a line. And there'd be no sense in their lying low about it, would there?"

"They might think you would go back," suggested his wife.

"So I shall of course, but in my own way and at my own time."

Mrs. Tharp turned her large blue eyes upon him. "Don't go back," she said.

The little man looked at her irritably. "Why not?"

"You haven't had any luck there."

"You've a lot of faith in me, haven't you?"

"I don't want anything to happen to you."

"Thank you, my dear, but I'm quite capable of looking after myself."

Mrs. Tharp's slow gaze rested on his damaged foot, but she said no more. The pain of it had made him short-tempered and unlike himself. She would not worry him, but she wished very much that he did not contemplate returning. However, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof and Tom's foot would keep him prisoner for some time yet.

Meanwhile the prisoner lay and cogitated. His problem was the whereabouts of the jewels, a nut impossible for him, in his ignorance, to crack. Having searched the newspapers in vain for any allu-

sion to them, he had perforce come to the conclusion that they had been appropriated by someone in the house. He knew that the family consisted of a middle-aged widow in comfortable circumstances and her two children, and that they kept a general servant. One of these four people must, he thought, be in possession of the package, but which? Was it the respectable mother, the young son, the pretty daughter, or the servant girl? He was inclined on the whole to accredit it to the maid. If she had it, well and good, by some means or other he would force her to disgorge. But how if it had fallen to one of the other three? That would complicate matters. He could search, oh yes, force an entrance and have a look about him. He knew the sort of places in which people hid their valuables, the safes and desks and drawers, with the key left under the mat or on a hook among the ivy. But he would not venture inside that house again if he could help it. His wife's "You haven't had any luck there," recurred to him. It was seldom that she offered advice, but when she did it was worth listening to. Tharp was a bridge player and knew that there were inexplicable runs of good and bad luck. When the cards were against him he always played cautiously; it was only when fortune had declared in his favour that he plunged.

The luck had, as his wife asserted, been against him at The Laurels, and therefore he would be careful.

"Who do you think has the parcel?" said Florence one day, when he had made it evident that he wanted to talk about his loss.

"The slavey who sweeps the room out of a morning might have found it," he answered slowly, "or the son. I put it down on a packet of his cigarettes. But the old woman is one of those who keep an eye on everything. She may have just picked it up and said nothing to nobody. Women like her are none too honest. They'd cheat over a railway ticket as soon as look at you.

"Oh, well," said his wife philosophically, "any one 'ud do that."

But Tharp was of a different opinion. There was cheating and cheating. Some people made a fuss if a fellow unexpectedly won at cards, but he held that a game was a game. You played to win and you went on which lay suited you best. He himself always played on the cross and no one had ever spotted him, while the extra risk added to the pleasure of the game. But railway companies, he drew the line there; Florence had never known him to cheat over a fare, now had she?

"How about that time at Margate, when you jumped in late starting, and the man at the barrier didn't notice to ask for your ticket when we got out? You hadn't one, and I don't seem to remember as you paid."

"My good girl, who'd pay when nobody asked him to?"

"Well—only a luney," allowed the other.

"This foot of mine doesn't seem to pick up much strength," grumbled the invalid. "And I've got my cough back. I think I want a change."

"This time o' year?" for it was late autumn, and Mrs. Tharp looked upon August as the holiday month.

"What does the time of year matter?" rejoined her spouse with some irritation. Women were so limited! Florence who had lived in great houses ought to have known better. "I want bracing, and I should get it if I went into lodgings on those downs beyond Eastham."

His wife gazed at him in stupefaction. The downs beyond Eastham were a lonely stretch of high ground, with an asylum on one side and a reformatory on the other. Her husband, who was as socially inclined as a Frenchman, would never be able to endure either the dulness or the associations. "You'd go melancholy mad," she averred.

"Not if I'd something to think about. Why, you silly, I'd be on the spot there. I know a house opposite the Downs Station where they take people, and there are plenty of trains running into Eastham and back."

"And it's a penny fare," said Florence, as if the detail were of importance.

"You and the kids had better come too," continued the lawgiver, "it'll look well."

"But what should I do with myself?"

Tharp grinned. "Go shopping in Eastham," he said, and his wife snorted at him indignantly.

"Just as the children are getting on so nicely at their school too," she said, but she did not seek to turn him from his purpose. Tharp was the master spirit, and she followed where he led. A few days later therefore, she went down to the little house opposite the Downs Station and took the rooms for a week. They might stay longer, but she fancied that her Tom would find the seven days in the country, in the depths of the country, about enough for him.

Meanwhile a change destined to upset some of Tharp's calculations had taken place at The Laurels. The day following Mrs. Smart's discovery of the jewels, Linda Olsen, her treasure of a maid, had given notice. She had been three years in her place, and though slow, had been satisfactory.

"But why do you want to leave me?" Mrs. Smart had demanded. Linda was a good girl, so efficient and, what is perhaps of more importance to the suburban mind, so clean. Her scrubbing left a board cream-white, instead of grey; her washing did not shrink the flannels, nor her ironing scorch the handkerchiefs. Under her mistress' sharp eye she had learnt to cook and to bake bread, to make preserves and to polish brass, as well as a hundred other useful things. She now explained that she had not seen her parents for three years, and that they had written begging her to return. She was

their only surviving child, the only one out of six, and they were getting old. She had saved her wages and if she returned would be able to make them comfortable.

"Till the money is all gone," said Mrs. Smart grimly. "Then I suppose you will come back."

The girl's pale cheek reddened. "Kristoffer Helleland, he is coming from America this next spring and he has money now, oh a lot. I do not think he will let me come back." She was deeply attached to her own country, and to the little town half way up a fjord, in southern Norway, the town in which she had been born. She thought of the high barren ridges in each side of the narrow water, of the wooden houses close to the sea on a spit of sandy land and of the tiny steamer that three times a week came round from Christiansand. Her lovely land. She would never, never leave it again.

Mrs. Smart, when she heard of the old playfellow who had grown wealthy in America, thought she had got to the root of the matter. "Ah then, of course you must go," she said, feeling rather sorry for the girl. How sad for her, just when she had grown used to English comfort, to have to go back to the cold barren poverty-stricken land from which she was come. Linda had told her that the Norwegians lived principally on cheese and fish and farm produce; and that provender being so scarce the careful people with tiny scythes harvested even

the grass that grew by the roadside. "But we shall miss you, Linda."

"And I, too," said Linda graciously. She would be unspeakably glad to get back to Flekkefjord, to eat once more the food to which since her childhood she had been accustomed, to speak her own language and settle among her own people. She would leave The Laurels without a sigh or a backward glance. Nor would Mrs. Smart be really sorry to see her go. They had lived happily together, but change is a good thing, and Linda was worth bigger wages than she had been getting. The mistress would be glad to have a younger girl in the kitchen, a girl to train, indeed had long had her eye upon the daughter of a clean and respectable woman in her "district." This girl, Annie Price, was now just sixteen, a fit and proper age at which to begin earning her living.

So it came to pass that when Tharp, still limping a little but otherwise much better for his stay on the downs, came to Eastham to prospect, a new girl reigned in Linda's kitchen.

One morning, shortly after Eva and her mother had left the house intent upon their usual shopping, a working-man with a bag of tools upon his shoulder limped down the gravelled path which led to the side door. He had been sent by the Gas Company to inspect the meter!

Eastham was not a large place and Annie Price

was a native. She knew by sight most of its inhabitants. "Newcomer?" asked she, as she let him in.

Tharp went back to the Cockney twang of his boyhood, a twang which he was under the impression he had eliminated from his everyday voice. "The chaps 'ere don't know their work," he said cheerfully, "so I've been sent down to teach 'em."

Annie was no more than a cheeky schoolgirl. She looked the little man up and down. "Did they let you travel 'arf price?" she asked.

Tharp grinned good-naturedly and took some tools out of his bag. He did various things to the meter, which was of course in the kitchen, wrote some figures on a scrap of paper, added them up, looked perplexed, and then added them up again. "I say, there's a leak somewhere," he said. "Your people are paying more than they should."

"Mrs. Smart won't like that," admitted the girl, who was neglecting her work in order to keep an eye on the stranger. She was not suspicious of him, she was only anæmic and lazy.

"I'd better find out where it is," said he, smoothing his stubby beard with a small but dirty hand.

"All right," and Annie led the way to the dining-room. In appearance she was typically Welsh, with large grey eyes, dark hair and well-formed features; but it is a question whether she knew that her father had been born in Carmarthen. For more years than she could count he had worked for Mr. Freeman,

the owner of the biggest lavender and mint farm in the neighbourhood, and her mother was Kentish.

"Bin 'ere long?" asked the man carelessly, as a swift glance assured him that his package was no longer on the dining-room mantel-shelf.

"A fortnight."

Tharp's heart sank. "Oh!" he said. "And the other girl?"

"She was some sort of a foreigner and she went back 'ome."

"There's no leak here," he said. He had once found employment in a Gas Works and as a consequence, really knew what he was about. "P'r'aps it's in the drorin'-room." And as they crossed the little passage he looked at the girl admiringly. "Funny to 'ave a foreigner when they could 'a got someone like you. What sort was she?"

"Not like what you'd think. Quiet's not the word for her, and she wasn't a bit dressy, not like those Frenchies generally are."

"Oh, French was she?"

"Well I did hear as she came from Normandy, and that's somewhere in France, leastways it was when I went to school." She was standing by the window looking idly out at the passers-by, but suddenly she sprang back and made for the door. "If that isn't Mrs. Smart come back, and I've never turned out my room."

"You had to shew me round," the man suggested and she took the hint.

"If you please ma'am," she said as Mrs. Smart and Eva let themselves into the house, "there's a man come from the Gas Works."

Tharp standing on the threshold of the drawing-room, his bag of tools across his shoulder, his workman's dress unimpeachably dusty and worn, looked what he professed to be. "Good-morning, ma'am," he said politely; "I've been sent down to inspect your meter and I find there's a slight leakage somewhere. I've looked at the dinin' and drorin'-room burners and they're all right, so I think it must be upstairs." His quick eyes had roved over the faces before him, and he had at once decided that whoever was guilty, it could not be the young girl with the soft and friendly eyes, who stood so quietly by her mother's side. He was glad that he had made his way into the house, for he now knew that neither the servant nor Miss Smart had his parcel. But the French girl who had left, what more likely than that she had carried it away with her?

Mrs. Smart led the way upstairs, and he followed at her heels. He thought her a notable-looking woman. There was a heaviness about her jaw which impressed him; and her eyes, though like those of her daughter, were by no means so friendly. The gas in the servant's bedchamber having been cut off, she led him past the door, and Annie's delinquencies remained for the moment undiscovered. In her son's room the window was open and a breeze was lifting the end of the muslin short-blind. But

Tharp's delicate nose caught a faint aroma of gas, and he realised that for once fortune had befriended him.

"We don't often use gas in the bedrooms," Mrs. Smart told him. "A candle does all right for the minute or two it takes my boy to get into bed."

"But there's a leak here," said the man, and striking a match, he moved it over the joints of the fittings until a tiny blaze, a mere thread of flame, rewarded him.

Mrs. Smart was amazed. "Well I never," she said, "and I'm always supposed to be so good at detecting anything of that sort."

"It only needs this nut screwed up," the man assured her. "I'll have it all right in a jiffy. If you've the window always open here, I daresay it would not be noticed; after all, it's nothing much."

Mrs. Smart thanked him and went to take off her outdoor clothes. In a moment Tharp had laid down his tools and slipped across to the big green safe in the opposite corner. The thing was new, and he surmised that it had been bought after his abortive attempt to take their silver. He caught hold of the big lacquered knob in the centre of the door and pulled, but without expecting any result. To his surprise, however, the thick and heavy door revolved slowly and presently disclosed the contents of the two iron shelves within. Tharp searched with quick and clever fingers, but the half-empty receptacle only held large and heavy pieces of sil-

ver, candelabra, salvers, a tea-service, and he bit his lip with sharp impatience. But he understood. The safe was locked at night when the family was asleep, it was not thought necessary to secure it during the time they were up and on the alert. As to the jewels, if Willy Smart had them, he probably carried them about with him.

Tharp had the nut screwed on before Mrs. Smart had laid aside her walking apparel, and while he tested burner and fittings in her room she moved about, putting the clothes she had taken off into their places. The man caught glimpses of neat piles of linen, of hats shrouded in tissue paper, of hanging skirts, but only glimpses, and they whetted his curiosity. He was not certain about Mrs. Smart, and some wild instinct prompted him to investigate further. She did not, however, provide him with the opportunity, for she stood by until he had finished, then took him to her daughter's room and the study, and finally showed him out of the house.

Tharp returned to his lodgings fairly well satisfied with his morning's work. He had been in almost every room of the house, he had been able to observe the position of the furniture and the possibilities of concealment which it afforded. One thing only remained for him to do before coming to a conclusion. He had seen Mrs. Smart, her daughter and her servant, and now he must interview her son.

On the following morning therefore, he went up

to town by the eight thirty-five. He had seen photographs of Willy Smart at The Laurels and he contrived to swing himself into the young man's compartment as the train was starting. His game leg made it difficult for him to secure his footing, indeed it was Willy's strong hand that pulled him in. His breathless thanks broke the ice and before long they were amicably discussing stocks and shares.

Tharp presently turned the conversation. He wanted to know what his companion thought of Eastham as a residential suburb.

Willy Smart had been born in the little place, had seen it develop and had a citizen's pride in it.

"It's very convenient," he said eagerly. "Only half an hour's run from town."

"Healthy?"

"I've lived here all my life and can't remember ever having a day's illness. It's so pretty too. You should see it in the spring, when the laburnums and lilacs and may trees are all out."

"You like it, then?" said Tharp keenly. He could not resist the temptation to study the man before him.

Willy shifted his position and looked out of the window.

"Oh well," he said apologetically, "I don't want to stop in one place all my life, otherwise it's all right."

"Hasn't there been some talk of burglaries down

here? The wife's a bit nervous, she likes the look of the place but——"

Smart was taken aback. "Well," he said, reddening slowly, "I don't think we've more than our share. Still—as a matter of fact—there was one at our place."

"Lately?" asked his companion.

"Some weeks back."

"Really now? That's interesting. Did you lose much?"

"Not a stiver. We found the silver laid out on the floor; but when we came to count it, we weren't a penny the worse."

"Ex-traordinary!"

"Of course I went to the police about it, but they haven't succeeded in finding the thief."

Tharp didn't like being called a thief and he couldn't see why, as the Smarts had been none the worse for his visit, they should have called in the police.

"I think I saw something about it in one of the papers," he said thoughtfully. "Still you didn't lose anything."

"No," said Willy, "but you don't like to think some stranger is trying to get hold of your belongings. I wouldn't mind fighting him for them, it's the sneaking in at night that I object to."

"Ah, but that's his cleverness, you know. You've got things and it's your business to look after them. He wants them and it's his to try and get them."

Willy accepted this dictum with surprising meekness. "I don't know that I'm keen on my belongings," he said restlessly. "They hamper a fellow. Still if you've got them, you can't let another man take them from you."

"Dog in the manger," smiled Tharp.

"That's about it, I fancy."

"I was reading about a burglary lately and it came out that the man had been disturbed before he had had time to take anything, indeed he'd been in such a hurry that he'd actually left behind a parcel he got at another house."

"I say now, did he really?" cried Willy delightedly. "What a lark! What was it he left behind?"

Tharp's bright eyes scanned the innocent young face. "Jewellery," he said rather shortly. It was evident to him that Willy knew nothing about the package.

"And the fellow left it behind? I hope it was valuable?"

"Oh, I believe it was," said Tharp.

"What a joke! What did they do with it?"

"Don't know. Handed it over to the police, I suppose," said Tharp bitterly, and the other nodded as if he understood. That was what he would have done—handed it over to the police. Tharp thought of the big red mansion and of his climb among the ivy and of the open passage window. The family had been out, the servants entertaining their friends on the other side of the house and he had had the

place to himself. It had been a warm afternoon, and not even a gardener had been about. The jewels had been in their case and he had only had to unlock it and fill his pockets. Lady Dudley Bodger had not returned from her motor drive until late that evening, and by that time he had been back in Camberwell Grove. It had been a pleasant expedition and what he had come for had been easily made his. He glanced across at Willy Smart with a sour smile. So he would have given the jewels up to the police, would he? But he had not had the opportunity. No, either the French maid—poor, innocent Linda Olsen, native of the most honest country in the world—had them, or the young fellow's mother, and if the latter, it was evident she was not of her son's way of thinking. He felt that Linda's disappearance was suspicious, but he still hoped that the jewels were within his reach. Mrs. Smart's heavy cheerful face had impressed him as inscrutable, and he knew that he would not rest until he had had his sensitive fingers among her accumulations. But he must be careful, very careful, for his wife had prophesied disaster.

CHAPTER V

Tom Tharp had long looked upon Christmas with its jollity and merrymaking as a time set apart for enterprises such as those by which he profited. It was pre-eminently the season for eating and drinking. People who could not afford port and sherry drank home-made wines, but everybody drank. Even the labourer who had been out of work for weeks felt himself entitled to more beer than he could pay for, while his prosperous neighbour stood a pint to this man and to that, and felt that he was 'keeping Christmas.' The ladder of society has many rungs and a different bottle hangs by each. People in the Smarts' position drank beer for dinner, and had port with their dessert, while Annie in the kitchen, had with her orange, apple and nuts, a glass of ginger wine. The consequence of so much eating and drinking was that on Christmas and Boxing Nights people were wont to sleep heavily. They relied upon the promise of 'peace and good will'; and when Tharp was about, woke to disillusionment.

This year he had decided to make his last attempt to regain Lady Dudley Bodger's jewels, on Christmas night. His visit, as a man from the Gas Works, had been prolific in information and among

other things he had noticed a square skylight which illumined the loft and was over a trap-door. It would be easy for him to swarm up the rain-water pipe, cross the bathroom roof and climb to the skylight. Once inside the house and his course was clear. If the jewels were there at all they must be in Mrs. Smart's bedroom; and that was where he would search. He knew exactly where to look and also, that though he must oil the locks, such furniture as hers, old and carefully polished would be unlikely to creak. She had pulled open drawers and unlocked wardrobe doors while he had been pretending to test the gas; and he had noted with admiration how quietly they had moved under her hands. He too had his reasons for objecting to 'modern stuff, gimcracks.'

On Christmas night therefore, Tharp after bicycling over from Camberwell, stabled his machine behind the hedge of an empty house and made his way into the Smarts' garden. He had with him a small silken ladder and as soon as he had cut out the two panes of the skylight, and lifted aside the trap-door, he fastened this to one side of the opening and let himself quietly down. Mrs. Smart, who slept on a feather bed or rather between two insurgent waves of it, was in the first sweet sleep of night. She had eaten of the turkey which had been her mother's Christmas gift, and she had partaken sparingly of the good port wine which Willy, in honour of the occasion, had brought down from town. She

enjoyed a glass of wine, no one more, but that self-restraint which is called temperance, underlay all her other qualities. Inconsistently comfort-loving and sensuous, she seemed the last person to exercise a wise frugality, but not even the license of Christmas could lead her astray. However, even one glass of port wine can affect a water-drinker, and Mrs. Smart had certainly fallen asleep as soon as her head was on its lavender-scented pillow.

Tharp, moving as if he were Ariel's self, had noiselessly turned the oiled handle of her door and slipped into the room. He paused to ascertain if she were asleep and then reassured by the sound of deep and regular breathing, set about his work. He was used to the unbroken slumbers of Christmas-keeping people, and having thought to find this particular woman asleep, he did not trouble to pay her any further attention; which was a mistake and one which, if he had known her a little better, he would not have committed.

For Mrs. Smart had lived from day to day in the expectation of his coming, and such expectation is a strain. Always a light sleeper, her nights were now filled with dreams, her mind struggling with the drowsiness of her body, and presenting her more frequently than she liked, with images of terror. When she opened her eyes upon the slight figure noiselessly ransacking her wardrobe, it seemed to her at first that one of these had materialised itself.

Tharp, who was in a smoke-grey suit, carried a

dark lanthorn the beams of which made his hands and arms and even his figure occasionally visible. Mrs. Smart, paralysed with momentary fear, her limbs loose beside her and her mouth suddenly parched, lay watching him; and as she watched, as she made out that the man was small and slight and young-looking, anger began to quicken in her breast. What right had this insignificant-looking stranger in her house, in her room? How dare he lay sacrilegious fingers upon what belonged to her? How dare he pry and search in her cupboards, turning over what was hers, violating the secrecy of her arrangements. Her eyes grew fierce and her heart hardened itself against this burglar who after all, was no bugbear but a man. A burly ruffian of bear-like power and build, the typical Bill Sykes, would have had more power over Mrs. Smart's imagination. This slim young fellow with his fine hands and dexterous movements, did not impress her in the least. She would have cowered before an appearance of strength, but mere intelligence was a different matter. She had some of her own, enough she hoped to outwit the stranger; and that reminded her that he was not digging and delving among her belongings out of either malice or curiosity, but that he had come in search of something which he considered his. The thought cooled her anger and allowed her to lie and watch his proceedings with a certain growing equanimity. What he thought his was now hers, and her optimistic temperament made

her hopeful of keeping it. He would be a spry youth if he got the better of her, a woman well versed in the ways of young people and old enough to be his mother. Calm though she was and faintly contemptuous of her adversary, Mrs. Smart nevertheless suffered from the suspense. When Tharp, softly closing the wardrobe doors, went across to the washstand, her pulses beat quickly. But no, he had passed the Swiss chalêt without even glancing in its direction!

The man did his work well. He had gone methodically through the wardrobe, had climbed up and investigated its top, had peered behind each piece of outstanding wood, and he overhauled washstand and chest-of-drawers as thoroughly, sifting the contents of the latter through his fingers, lifting each drawer out of its frame and flashing his light through the dark apertures. Satisfied at last, he pushed-to the last drawer and turned towards the bed.

On Mrs. Smart's marriage her mother, who had not had much to bestow, had presented her with the old fourposter; and ever since, year in and year out, Minty had slept under its dimity roof. During the annual spring cleaning, the most arduous day's labour was always that of stretching the stiffly starched back and cover onto their wooden frame, and the hanging of the valance and curtains. The posts were deeply carven with a design of wheat, the ears springing out at the top, after the fashion

of the lotus leaves in ancient Egyptian capitals. They blessed the bed with fruitfulness and gave it value; and Mrs. Smart, who rubbed and polished them with her own hands, was proud of their antiquity. What with all the starched dimity which hung from and beside the curtain poles, and that which had been tacked on to its frame below the palliasse however, the bed might have held innumerable secrets; and when Tharp turned towards it, he cast a dubious look over its immense and shadowy whiteness.

As he stepped noiselessly towards her, Mrs. Smart's discreet eyelids drooped, and thinking it wise to take on the semblance of sleep, she lifted her upper lip a very little and let out the beginnings of sound. Tharp adjusting his lanthorn contrived that its light should be faintly diffused through the general obscurity. A sudden flash awakens, but a gentle lessening of the darkness has no such disastrous effect. Before beginning again, he paused to glance keenly at the woman in the bed, at the tumbled dark hair and immobile countenance. It struck him that that was what she would look like when dead, and he could fancy from the set of her jaw that whatever secret she had, would go with her into the grave. So far he had found nothing, had come upon no trace and the sight of this resolute face lying as it would in its last sleep, left him uneasy. Not on that account however would he slacken his search, for he also was of a good cour-

age. He turned to his work, his clever fingers quartering the ground, slipping in and out, testing for the indication of weight which would tell him that something unusual was at hand. Palliasse, hangings, valance, bolster, he examined each in turn, but found nothing. The fine old bed was as innocent of contraband as the row of boots under the dressing-table, every one of which he had lifted and shaken!

The man was puzzled. He stood for some seconds considering, while his eyes roved quickly about the room, and Mrs. Smart, who was superstitious, felt glad that she had hung the gilt horse-shoe that had been Eva's Christmas present, toe downward over her door. It was only within the last day or two that someone had told her it was unlucky to hang a horse-shoe upside down.

At last the enemy moved away from her bed and stepped towards the fireplace. Mrs. Smart thrilled with weakening hope as the man after carefully examining grate and chimney turned his attention to the mantel-shelf. He glanced at its ornaments with contempt, peered inside the clock case, lifted the cheap green vases and opened the unlocked trinket-case; last of all he came to the shut but not closed chalêt, the chalêt which had been made, poor pretty fragile thing, to hold a tinkling musical box. Mrs. Smart saw his fingers push back the lid, even faintly rustle the paper within, and when with lanthorn turned onto the top package, he read the in-

scription "Letters from my husband," she could almost fancy that he "pshawed" under his breath. At any rate he turned away with a hopeless gesture.

Where could the jewels be? He wanted them very much. They had been a splendid haul and the money they would have fetched meant a good deal to him. Having been laid up for so many weeks, he was actually a little short of cash; but if only he could have laid his hands on that necklace and tiara, he would have had money to spend on necessities, money to throw away upon pleasures and money to put in the bank, rolls and rolls of fat golden sovereigns. He stood, once more at a loss. Perhaps after all, and in spite of the instinct which kept him uneasily suspicious of Mrs. Smart, the French servant had carried them away with her.

Meanwhile Mrs. Smart's heart was drumming out a pæan of thanksgiving. He had not found them, he must have almost touched them and yet he had not found them. "Well?" she said suddenly, her voice from the depths of the great bed sounding hollow and strange, and causing the burglar to spring round in sudden fear.

He flashed the lanthorn onto her face, but only to realise that his apprehension was greater than hers. She still lay in her furrow between the swelling halves of the feather bed, her dark head sunk in the pillows that she had sewed and waxed and stuffed; but her gaze, although the darkness ren-

dered him invisible, was directed towards him and was full of a bold indignation.

"Oh, hush!" he cried, instinctively lifting his hand, and Mrs. Smart rightly interpreted the gesture as one of fear.

"I like your impudence," she said wrathfully and without lowering her voice, and as she spoke she pulled herself into a sitting posture and gathered the clothes warmly about her. "What are you doing in my room?"

Tharp was taken aback, but his quick brain suggested that the crêpe mask he wore might affect this woman as it had others. Taking a step forward he came within the radius of light and Mrs. Smart could see that her first impression of him was correct, that he was small, youthful-looking and of a refined appearance. She scanned all that was visible of his face, a broad brow, pointed chin and two long narrow lips, and her steady gaze proved disconcerting.

"What am I doing in your room?" said Tharp at last, "I fancy you know that, about as well as I do. I've come after the jewels." He stiffened his back and tried a bluff. "Oh don't you pretend you haven't got them, for I've reliable information that you took them and kept them, and that they're somewhere in this room."

Mrs. Smart looked at him contemptuously. After all his bluff was not better than hers; but then she was certain that he must be guessing. "I don't

know what you mean," she said. Being mistress of the situation she could afford to parley, was indeed sufficiently interested in the man to do so.

"I came here some time ago, two months by now it must be——"

"Do you mean to tell me that you were the burglar who came after our silver?"

Tharp nodded. "And precious useless stuff I found it. Much too big for me to carry away."

"Ah, but you would have made shift to take some if we had not disturbed you." she retorted shrewdly. "And to think it was only a little man like you, as young as my own son!" She was amazed at her former fears.

Tharp was several years older than she thought and his size happened to be a sore point. "Come to think of it," he said sulkily, "diamonds are always small and donkeys big. But those jewels now. You might just as well give them up. What could you do if you kept them? All the trade has descriptions, and if you tried to sell would be down on you like a shot. But it's different with me. I know my way about and could get rid of them easy."

Mrs. Smart heard him with interest. So the jewels were as valuable as she had thought, more so perhaps. All the more reason then for her to keep what she had found. She felt that she could do this best, by feigning ignorance. "I don't know what you are talking about," she said, and so indiffer-

ently that Tharp felt more doubtful than before. He tried another tack.

"Look here, if you'll give them up, I'll go shares with you. I can't make a better offer than that, but I swear on my honour I'll give you half of whatever I get."

"A thief's honour," thought Mrs. Smart distrustfully, and maintained her plea of ignorance. "What are these jewels and where did you get them?" she asked.

Tharp hesitated. "Where'd I get them? Oh from a big house not a hundred miles away, and I left them on your dining-room mantel-piece."

"Then they aren't your jewels?"

"We-ell, things change hands. They're mine now."

"Or they may have changed hands again," said Mrs. Smart. "Are you sure you left them here?"

"Positive."

"In a heap or a box or what?"

The question annoyed him, for if she had had them she would hardly have asked it. "Parcelled up in brown paper," he said.

"Oh," returned Mrs. Smart, as if busy considering this information. "Well, I haven't seen that parcel and I don't want to. Another woman's jewellery—why I should have had to send it back to her! What a bad lot you must be, and so young too. I am afraid your mother must have spoilt you." She looked at him severely, the lines of her

pleasant face full of reprobation, and Tharp felt for all the world as if he were what she thought him.

"Oh come now," he said, "it takes all sorts to make a world, and as things go I'm not a bad lot. I was born light-fingered and I make it pay, that's all. A man should use his gifts. You're not responsible for them because they were given you free gratis, and for nothing when you came into this wicked world; but what you've got I take it you're expected to use."

Mrs. Smart continued to look at him severely. "Young man," she said, and sitting there, huddled in the white bedclothes, she looked like some old wise owl, "you oughtn't to be a burglar and you know you oughtn't, and that's all there is to it."

Tharp shrugged his shoulders lightly. "Well, well," he said, "that doesn't matter; what I'm worried about is these jewels, clinking fine things they are, and I want them. Do you think your slavey has had a finger in the pie?"

"The girl I had then is gone."

"That looks as if she knew something about them."

"It isn't likely, for she was a Norwegian and Norwegian girls are a marvel for honesty. Not a hairpin nor a sheet of notepaper, nor so much as a sweet will they touch."

"Exceptions prove the rule." He did not believe that any kind of foreigner was likely to be particular, especially in the case of jewels worth some

thousands of pounds. He looked at Mrs. Smart thoughtfully, inclined to believe in her ignorance. She had spoken the truth about her servant, a truth which he could test, why not then about the jewels?

"You have a son and a daughter," he said, and looked at her inquiringly.

To his astonishment the equable woman flashed into sudden anger. "If my boy had seen your parcel it would have been in the hands of the police before now," she said sharply, "and as to my daughter—how dare you—you—" she leant with bitter emphasis on the pronoun—"how dare you even mention her?" She had raised her voice a little and Tharp looked at her in alarm.

"Somebody is about," he said, and slipped hastily round the bed. For one moment he hesitated, the handle of the door in his hand, and then his indignation got the better of him. Besides his wife, this was the only woman who knew him for a thief; and she had not only disapproved, she had been contemptuous. The censor of respectability had been swung before his nostrils too many years for him to tamely submit to its removal. He was furious with Mrs. Smart.

"After all," he cried, "I believe you've got them. One thief knows another." And shutting off his lanthorn, he vanished into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER VI

Tom Tharp having shot his bolt at a venture and got nothing but an unanswered, unanswerable question, made off in haste. As he climbed the silken ladder into the moonlit darkness of the loft, he heard Mrs. Smart calling to her son; and he cursed her, as he ran across to the skylight. But he knew he was safe. Willy Smart might come flying down the garden after him, but by the time the house door was unlocked, unbolted and unchained, he would be on his bicycle and heading for London. He was returning a chilled and disappointed man, for he knew that whether Mrs. Smart or the Norwegian girl had his package, it was lost to him. He had now done all that he could, and commonsense on the whole inclining him to the belief that the stones were no longer in England, he was more than half satisfied with his evening's work. At least that plump old woman with the inscrutable face had not got the better of him. The necklace and tiara had not been in her room. Having gone over every inch of space he was positive of that. If it had been otherwise however, he could not have helped it, for his last visit to The Laurels had been paid. The tenacity of the Englishman is evidenced by the care which policemen take of the stable after the

steed has been stolen. The Smarts' house would never more be accessible to thieves. The burglar had come and come again, and the sluggish imagination of all the members of the force would be stirred. From thenceforward the man on duty at night would have an eye—a bull's-eye—upon The Laurels and the guardianship of that house would pass into a tradition.

Tom Tharp with his gutter shrewdness, always knew when to give any neighbourhood a wide berth; and from that Christmas Day he avoided Eastham, almost forgetting, almost but not quite, the unsolved problem that it held for him.

That night, after Willy and Eva, excited and no little disturbed, had returned shivering to their beds, Mrs. Smart put out the candle which she had lighted and, softly happed about with blankets and all those innumerable feathers that supported and surrounded her, lay thinking of the man with whom she had so lately talked, the man who if he could—this was how she put it to herself—would have stolen her treasure trove. That he had not succeeded was in his favour, but she was conscious for all her triumph of a little residue of anger. He had wanted what was hers, and though she felt secure against further molestation, she quite illogically resented the suspicious search and his too just appreciation of herself. Not that his words had carried conviction or found their way to her conscience, for Minty Smart was perfectly satisfied

with her own ways and works. It had never occurred to her to doubt their wisdom or propriety; it did not now, but she felt vaguely uncomfortable, like a hen whose feathers have been ruffled by an adverse wind.

Nevertheless it was a soothing thought that in their war of wits she had come off victor. The man had searched her room, had questioned her and gone away empty. She looked through the darkness of the wintry night toward the mantelshelf. How her heart had leaped when those light fingers of his had touched the Swiss box, lifting the warped lid and lightly rustling the papers within. He had felt sure that they were only letters; that nobody would hide valuables in such a place and he had turned away. Mrs. Smart smiled to herself. She had hidden things before, innocent things, trifles that she was keeping from her husband, other trifles that had to do with Christmas and birthdays. After all the burglar had been no cleverer than the other men with whom in her time she had had dealings.

In due course another aspect of the matter, one which caused her to draw a quick breath of relief, presented itself. The envelope of mounted gems was now indisputably hers. Tharp had made his search and failed. He had had the house at his mercy, had looked whithersoever he would; and in spite of his last words, she felt that he had satisfied himself as to the innocence of her and her room.

He would think from now on, that Linda had them, Linda the scrupulous Norwegian! Mrs. Smart with her knowledge of Linda's character thought that rather amusing. At any rate the jewels were now really and truly hers. No one in all the world knew that she had them, no one could interfere with her or lay claim to them.

What should she do with them? How convert them into money? They were very very lovely, but not on that account would she keep them by her; she was no miser, even of gems. Of course they must be taken out of their settings and resolved into mere heaps of coloured crystal. And then?

Mrs. Smart did not know. She turned the question over and over in her mind, seeking an answer, and as she did so sleep came upon her unawares, the healthy sleep out of which Tharp had awakened her.

Boxing Day that year came in with a scurry of snow. The heavens brooded, borne down by their weight of grey water and every few minutes a whirl of flakes further darkened the air. Annie Price running to answer a sharply impatient ring at the front door, wondered who could be coming so early on such a morning, and found herself face to face with that little Jack-in-office, the telegraph boy. New to his work, proud of his uniform and of the usual gaily impudent type, he handed over a buff envelope, and snapping out, "Any answer?"

stood to wait, his impertinent back towards the girl, his manly legs apart. Annie, who knew him as she knew everybody in Eastham, gave his cap a tilting push over his eyes, and having thus demoralised him, departed with the missive. Her mistress's morning cup of tea was ready, and she could take the two up together; it didn't matter if Bob Purley were kept waiting, the young monkey!

Mrs. Smart had slept heavily. The strain of expectation being at an end, her slumbers had been dreamless and refreshing, but a little crease of anxiety drew her eyebrows together when she saw the envelope by her saucer. She disliked telegrams. Her experience of them had been small but alarming, for as far as she knew they never communicated any but evil tidings. She opened the buff envelope with misgivings, therefore, misgivings which were speedily justified.

"Mrs. Lovell slipped on stairs yesterday, hurt her back. Please come. Tamsin."

Emergencies never found Mrs. Smart at a loss. Her mother had been injured, was ill and she was required to nurse her. In a minute she was sitting up, self-possessed and ready.

"A telegraph form Annie," she said, "and the ink out of the dining-room," and then raising her voice she called to her daughter. Eva, warm and lazy, was drowsily awaiting the summons to rise, but she tumbled out of bed at once, and still only half awake hurried into her mother's room.

"It can't be another burglar," she murmured sleepily as she pushed open the door.

"Coming as soon as possible," wrote Mrs. Smart, dropping each word into its appointed space and Eva, perceiving that something had really happened, woke up sufficiently to read the summoning telegram.

"Why it's Granny," she said, drawing her pink dressing-gown more closely round her as the cold air from the open front door blew up the stairs. "But you said she couldn't come here for Christmas, because she was in bed with a cold?"

"Oh, but you know your grandmother," said Mrs. Smart, as she handed telegram and money to the servant. "Nothing would keep her in bed for very long. I only hope she isn't badly hurt. She's seventy you know."

"I suppose you'll have to stay and nurse her?"

"Yes, dearie, but it will be all right, for you can look after Willy."

"I hate the house when you aren't in it, Mother."

Mrs. Smart kissed her affectionately. "Good little girl!" she said. "What were you doing today?"

"I was going skating with the Johnsons. Would you rather that I didn't?"

"Not at all. Go and enjoy yourself, dearie."

She did not think her mother could be seriously injured or surely Tamsin would have said so, and she knew that Mr. Flowerdew, Mrs. Johnson's un-

married brother, had suggested the skating expedition. Where her children were concerned Mrs. Smart saw all that was to be seen.

"I wish it weren't Boxing Day, for of course the trains to Ashwater will run anyhow, but I shall ask Willy to come with me. Now dearie I'll get up."

"And I'll scramble into my clothes and see about breakfast."

"Yes, do. There's the cold ham and those bloaters—see that Annie toasts them properly."

As Mrs. Smart had feared, the train service to Ashwater was suffering from Christmas dislocation. The place was small and lay in a rural district a few miles from Eastham. The thriving suburb treated its Sunday-school scholars in the beech woods of Ashwater, drove its beanfeasts over to Ashwater Green and took its Girls' Friendly and Young Men's Christian on expeditions to the gorse-covered, heath-grown common. The place, in its sleepy stagnant way, was pretty and did very well for picnics, its soil also suiting the Wyandottes on Mrs. Lovell's little farm. She had begun with a big ten-acre field by the side of which the Ash had run merrily over its shallows. To this when the chance offered she had added the meadow on the other side of the river and quite lately had bought a strip of oak copse with a piece of pasture beyond. The covert topped a little rise, sheltering the hayfield at its side from north and north-easterly winds,

and the land sloped away to a bend of the river. The tiny farm was compact and it was also freehold. Mrs. Lovell had rented until she could buy; but when the opportunity came, she had the money saved and ready. She believed in the future of Ashwater. "When it becomes a suburb," she had said, "the land about here will be valuable." And already a far-sighted builder had put up one or two of the big bare red-brick houses, which stockbrokers and others find themselves able to fancy. Mrs. Lovell, with the yeoman feeling for stability, called them "mushrooms," and esteemed them not at all, yet was glad to see them being built. They would bring more life into the place, circulate money, add to her careful profits, and she, despising, would yet make use of them.

Old Meadow Farm, as her little holding was called, was some ten minutes' walk from Ashwater Station, in a turning off the main road, and Ashwater was not more than a dozen miles from Eastham. But so great had been the Christmas demoralisation of the traffic that it was afternoon before Mrs. Smart and Willy reached the village. As they turned off the highway into the broad lane which ran past the farm, the former perceived that a vehicle of some kind was standing by the gate.

"I expect that is Dr. Hastings' trap," she said, involuntarily quickening her steps. "He is late on his rounds."

"Oh well," said Willy cheerfully, "it's Boxing

Day, and I expect even doctors keep Christmas. Come, Mater, don't run."

But Mrs. Smart pressed on firmly. "I haven't seen the old man for a long time," she said with a sort of determined optimism, "and if we don't hurry he may be gone when we get there." She would not admit even to herself, that the sight of his carriage had made her anxious and Willy said no more. Nor was it long before they came to the little green gate set between hedges of hawthorn and opening upon a stone-flagged path, at the other end of which was the green-painted door of the farm.

Mrs. Smart's hand was first on the latch, but her fingers trembled too much to lift it. "It's the cold," she said apologetically as Willy pushed back the gate and let her through. "It makes my fingers all thumbs," and she hurried on to the house.

A bright brass handle shone amid the green paint, but as Mrs. Smart touched it, the door fell back before her, and the wrinkled autumn face of Tamsin Tinney, her mother's servant and friend, looked out in greeting.

"Ah do be glad to see 'ee," the woman said with a sort of subdued heartiness, her soft Cornish voice broadening emotionally as she spoke. "You'm finely welcome though 'tis a sad house to-day. But 'ee've been long on the way, ah've been expectin' of 'ee ever since ah sent the wire."

Mrs. Smart followed her into the house and they

paused all three in the narrow ill-lighted passage. "We came as quickly as we could," she said, "but we had to change twice, the trains were awful."

"Aw, they do belong to be, holiday time."

"And how—how is my mother?"

The creases in Tamsin's old-apple face deepened. She had lived with Mrs. Lovell for over twenty years and had become more friend than servant. Since the accident, the nursing as well as the work of the farm had devolved upon her; and having been up all night, she was beginning to feel the strain. "Ah'm fine and anxious about she," she said, in tired and depressed tones.

"Oh, Tamsin!" The note of anxiety in the voice was clear now.

"'Twas Christmas mornin' as her fell and doctor, he came twice yesterday and he've a-been twice to-day. But it ain't no use. Ah'm feared her's got the call."

"Come, come, Tamsin," said Willy's firmly cheerful voice from behind, "you mustn't frighten my mother."

"Oh why didn't you send over yesterday," cried Mrs. Smart, with the feeling that her presence might somehow have staved off disaster.

"Christmas, my dear. There wasn't nobody to send, aw there's doctor coming now."

A man's step crossed the sick-room, came out on the landing and began to descend the stair. The three faces upturned towards him glimmered white

in the dark entry. His coming would bring the last word, the sentence of life or death; to all three he had changed from the mere kindly doctor of their everyday knowledge into a man of mystery, one heavy with strange knowledge, something portentous.

Dr. Hastings was a grey-haired man, with a habit of staring so fixedly at people, that they found his gaze unpleasant. He had been Mrs. Lovell's doctor the forty odd years that she had been in Ashwater, and Mrs. Smart had long since grown accustomed to his fixed expression. Dissociating herself from the others, she advanced a step. "My —my mother?" she said, with a little break in her voice. The doctor took her affectionately by the arm and led her into the little room to the right of the front door, a room known as the parlour. "Now, now my dear," he said soothingly, as he shut the door, leaving Willy and the old servant in the passage. He had known Minty Smart since her childhood, had prescribed for her infantile ailments and watched her grow up into healthy womanhood. She was a type of whom he, as a doctor, could heartily approve; but one which brought him little profit. As he stood with his round glassy eyes fixed staringly upon her anxious face and his kind hand on her arm, he wondered how to put into words what he must say, he who was so often called upon to utter sad and terrible things, ultimate truths.

And Mrs. Smart, though incredulous, was very much afraid. The burden of her forty years had fallen away, leaving her as young and frightened as she had been all those summers ago, when for some trifling ailment she had been sent for to interview this same dread man.

"Mrs. Lovell has had a bad fall," the doctor said, his sympathetic voice contrasting pleasantly with his staring eyes, "a very bad fall. She slipped on the oilcloth at the head of the stairs—dangerous thing, oilcloth!—and fell sideways. Oh, not down the stairs, no, but she is a good age, is she not?"

"Seventy last birthday," murmured Mrs. Smart. She was trying to thrust away the chill octopus-like fears which were enveloping her, trying not to hear the pity in her companion's tones. She wanted to believe that it was unnecessary, that pity.

"Three-score years and ten," said Dr. Hastings gravely. "Man's allotted space of time. My dear Mrs. Smart—her allotted space."

"Oh no, doctor, oh no."

"There are internal injuries," said the inexorable voice.

"But such a little accident—only a slip!" She was pleading for a reversal of that incomprehensible, incredible sentence.

"She has worked hard, and she is old," said the doctor. "A strong old woman, yes, but you must not hope. The body is a delicate machine—very easily damaged beyond repair."

Mrs. Smart stood looking before her, her strong hands tightly gripped together, until the tears rose in her eyes, fell over and splashed down upon the round walnut wood table, the table of whose beautiful grain her mother was so proud. She pulled out a large linen handkerchief—she had no use for lace and muslin futilities—and instinctively attempted to obliterate them, but she did not know that she was doing so. The suddenness of the blow had numbed her. She could not understand, would not until much later, that her mother, undemonstratively loved for six and forty years, was about to die.

She put the large handkerchief to her eyes and then turned a steady face upon the doctor; and he gave her further details, what he knew and what he surmised. He had brought his partner, old Dr. Bell, out earlier in the day and young Bell had accompanied them; but old experience and young knowledge had agreed. The case was hopeless, had been hopeless from the beginning and Mrs. Lovell, do what they would, and they had tried many things, was slowly sinking.

Mrs. Smart looked away from him towards the door. "Thank you, Dr. Hastings," she said, "I am sure you have done everything that you could. Now I will go to my mother."

He gave her a few directions with regard to nourishment and medicine; and she wondered why he should be able to alleviate and sustain where he

could not cure. She had thought that doctors were for the mending of broken bodies; but it seemed as if their work was to render easy the passing of souls. She listened, however, listened as if the palliatives of food and stimulant might have a healing virtue, and when she had heard all that he could tell her, went quickly out.

Mrs. Lovell slept in a room at the head of the steep and narrow stairs and her child could remember her choice of it on their first coming to the farm, could remember it as a bare and echoing place with lattice windows, to look out of which she had had to climb upon a chair. Even as a tiny child she had liked the view over the sloping garden and down the broad ten-acre field to where the river shone between a fringe of bushes. There had been so many things to interest her, from the row of beehives just below, to the fat white ducks squattering in the mud at the far end of the field. Perhaps Mrs. Lovell, who worked so hard and who so loved her work, had chosen the room for the very reason that rendered it dear to her little daughter. Here, as she lay in bed she could hear the cows stir in their stanchions, the pony in his stall; and as she dressed could see the hungry creatures looking out of sty and hutch and run, towards her, their providence. She had enjoyed feeding and caring for this multitude of living creatures, and it was nothing to her that all these enchanting chicks and ducklings, calves and piglets were being brought into

existence merely in order to be killed and eaten. She created, but took no responsibility for the fate of her creatures—and possibly in that was only following a great example.

As Mrs. Smart went blindly towards the stairs, Tamsin, who was gone into the kitchen, a big room at the back, which ran the whole width of the house, stepped to the door and looked after her. She loved her mistress and she was jealous, fancying that she who had until now been so much to the old woman, would be shut out at the last. The relatives would be everything, the servant who had nursed and tended her, would be relegated to her proper place —the kitchen. And it was true that Araminta Smart, going into the presence of her dying mother, had forgotten Tamsin, but not of malice aforethought. At that moment her own children were dim and far-off things, and her husband had never been. She was back in the past, in a day of sickness when she had been the invalid and her somewhat stern and silent mother had relaxed the bonds of discipline, and played with and amused her.

How strong her mother had been, sitting up with her at night and yet able to go about her work as usual the following day. And now it was that mother who had been smitten and whose strength was at an end.

Mrs. Smart paused upon the threshold of the bed-chamber and when at last she pushed back the

door, could speak in cheerful tones. "Why mother dear," she said, "what is this?"

The wintry afternoon was closing in, but a bright fire burned in the grate and cast a flickering light over the old-fashioned bed. It was from her mother that Mrs. Smart had learnt her appreciation of feather-beds and one, home-made and full, was piled high upon the four-poster. Deep in it, deep and lying very low, was the woman who had been so strong. She lay perfectly still, her face once pleasantly coloured but now pale, turned towards the door and her arms with their knotted hands stretched by her side. As Mrs. Smart entered, her eyelids lifted in a tired way and she half smiled a welcome.

"That you, Minty?" she said languidly, "I've been expecting you this hour or more."

"The trains are running anyhow to-day, mother."

"Ah yes, I expect so." She glanced towards a chair and Mrs. Smart took it. She had never been a demonstrative daughter and now, though her heart was bursting with love and sorrow, she could not show anything of what she felt. She looked across at her mother, a careful smile upon her lips, and thought how ill she looked, how changed. Mrs. Lovell had been rosy and dark-eyed with a sufficiency of shining silver hair, and though a quiet woman her manner had been brisk. Now the dark eyes were sunken and the full comfortable face had

grown thin. She seemed to doze between her words, and the resonance had gone out of her voice.

"Well child," she said presently, waking from one of these short and frequent sleeps, "so this is the end." She said it simply and as if announcing what her daughter must have expected to hear, but the ruth in Minty's heart broke its way out for a moment. She flung herself on her knees by the bed, caught the cold hand between her warm ones and sobbed.

"Oh no Mother, no, I can't let you go."

"It is a pity," said the old voice regretfully. "If it hadn't been for that slip I was good for another ten years. Doctor told me so."

"Mother, it can't be true," cried the daughter agonising at her side. Oh it was the truth, she had seen that it was, but she would not allow it.

"I wish it weren't, Minty. But this morning I could raise myself in bed and I can't now. I'm going fast."

"Oh Mother, Mother dear."

The old woman lay looking at the bowed head. She regretted their parting, she knew that she regretted it, but weakness had muffled her emotions. She could not feel as her daughter was feeling. Indeed she wished that Minty would not weep so despairingly. It was distressing and when you are very tired, very weak, you want to be let alone. "You've been a good child, Minty, always a good child," she said at last.

"And you the best of mothers," sobbed the other with remorseful memory of all the times that she had run counter to her parent's wishes. Mrs. Lovell closed her eyes again and while she slept Minty struggled with herself, trying to regain her self-control.

"I've done what I could," said the sick woman presently, her mind picking up the thread of conversation where it had been dropped, "but there were things that stood in the way; I never spoke to you about them, I judged it wiser not, but I dunno, I dunno." Her voice trailed off into silence. Though it was too late for her to find their answers, the problems which had perplexed her in the past were still putting their unanswerable queries.

"I'm going somewheres, Minty."

"Why of course," said Mrs. Smart in a shocked tone of voice, and a faint smile flickered across the face of the older woman. She was more intelligent than her daughter.

"I've never held with the heaven and hell and resurrection idea," she said slowly. "Dunno why, but I just haven't. But you needn't worry, my dear, the curate has been and given me the Communion so I'm all right, and now I feel free to have my own ideas."

Mrs. Smart was glad to hear that all had been done properly and in order. She saw nothing strange in this outward conformity and secret doubt.

You must render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's, but the outward and visible sign was all that was necessary.

"I'm glad Mr. Shand has been," she said, and rose to give the invalid some of the chicken jelly which stood ready on the inevitable little table by the side of the bed.

Mrs. Lovell took it readily. "A nice young feller," she said tolerantly. A farmer's daughter, she had never pretended to any great nicety of speech, indeed, pretence of any kind was foreign to her nature. She had lived to bargain and to save, she had lived for herself and for those belonging to her, and now her clean austere life had run its course. She did not think she had anything with which to reproach herself, anything to regret. "I've done my best here," she said, "so I expect I'm going somewheres pleasant. But the where don't bother me, though if it had been heaven it would have done."

"Oh—heaven!" said Mrs. Smart, with a vision of heavenly choirs, seas of glass and sapphire thrones.

"I've a prejudice against heaven," said Mrs. Lovell and fell quietly asleep.

But her words had pushed Mrs. Smart's thoughts into unwonted channels; and when after a short time, the tired lids rose over the dark eyes, the younger woman leant towards her eagerly.

"You will see father," she said. Unimaginative

as she was, she could yet see her mother falling asleep here to wake in the "somewheres pleasant," the place to which her father was already gone. The prospect did not destroy her sense of impending loss, but it gave to the life after death a sudden nearness and reality.

Mrs. Lovell moved her head restlessly and her daughter noticed that her hair had lost its gloss, what had been silver was now merely white.

"Maybe," said the sick woman, but her tones were unenthusiastic, "maybe and maybe not. He's ahead of me by over thirty years and he'll have had time to forget. I've often thought that, Minty. Every birthday I've said to myself: 'Another year, more and more time for him to forget.'"

"You don't want him to remember?" On her death-bed Mrs. Lovell was breaking the long silence of her life, and what she said made her seem a stranger to her nearest and dearest.

"I dunno as I do. You see, my dear, well we was more mated than matched. I thought it a fine thing, me being only a farmer's daughter, to marry a lawyer and at first it answered all right, but afterwards—well!"

"I had no idea."

"Of course not. I wasn't telling you, and children are blind enough about some things, take 'em for granted I suppose."

"And father?"

"He's gone my dear and he's been gone a long

time; happen he's found the right woman where he is."

"But there's to be no marrying."

"Tut, men'ull be men and women women as long as they've any kind of life. You want to see Dick again and I——"

Once more the old voice faded and only the busy thoughts ran to and fro in the dying brain. Ah, the years between! For a little time she was back, a girl under her mother's wing, and Tom Whipple, a neighbour's son, was looking through the dairy window at her as she churned, she in her clean lilac cotton and he very spruce and spick and span. The light in his eyes and the tones of his voice, she could see and hear them, though the mists of fifty years hung between then and now. They had been sweethearts, she and Tom, until the "gentleman" had come between; and she would like, in this pleasant country whither she was journeying to meet Tom again, Tom grown old or Tom still young, it hardly mattered which. Life had taught her that instincts are given us for our guidance; but what would be the use of knowledge if she were never to use hers, never to see Tom again?

She sighed and began to speak of what she was about to leave. "The farm was bought and paid for in your name, Minty—to save the death duties you know, and that is why I've insisted on paying you the few shillings a year rent—but unless you thought of settling here, I'd like Tamsin to have it."

"Tamsin?"

"She knows how to make it pay. I've given her a share in the profits this many a year and she'd do well by it. Let her pay you a bit of rent, not too much, and work it for the next few years. She'd save against her old age and you don't want it, you've enough."

"Oh I've enough, yes." Like a flash of varicoloured light came the thought of her treasure trove. "And she's been a good servant to you. Very well then, Mother."

"Thank you, my dear, that takes a load off my mind, for if you'd been agin it you'd have been in your right. But you're like me in your dealings, fair and honest, though as far as looks go, you are a bit like your father too."

"Me?" said Minty in surprise. "Why I'm always said to be the image of you."

"There's a something about the shape of your head, Willy has it too, that reminds me of your father. No, now Eva's me if you like, just what I was as a girl." She paused. "Now my dear, send Tamsin up to me for a little. I want to tell her I've arranged with you."

Mrs. Smart found that Tamsin had been putting her restlessness to some use, and had prepared a meal for the new-comers. She was bustling about the big brick-floored kitchen, but when told she could go up to Mrs. Lovell, she went quickly, leaving everything as it was. After all, the relatives

did not mean to keep her away from her mistress, they had only kindly feelings toward her, and her own friendliness, the friendliness which had grown steadily through twenty years of intercourse, rushed back into her heart. She was glad, as she ran stumbling up the stairs, that she had laid the table. Doubtless Mrs. Smart would be thankful for a cup of tea; and when she heard what her mistress had to tell she was still more glad.

She was absent for half an hour and when she came back tears were coursing down the channels in her old-apple face, the channels which time had grooved for them.

"The mistress wants 'ee to go back, you and the young master," she said.

Willy, though a kind and sympathetic boy, was feeling very much out of his element. While his mother had been upstairs he had lounged on the old settle by the fire, and tried to keep his thoughts attuned to the sorrowful gravity of the occasion. He would be sorry to say good-bye to his grandmother, but he was young and full of his own concerns. He had meant to go skating on the big flooded meadow at Eastborough and though he would have given up more than that to oblige his mother, his thoughts kept straying from the sombre and silent kitchen to his idle skates. When Mrs. Smart went back to the sick-room he followed slowly, but the warm blood in his veins protested against what awaited him. Never before in all his three

and twenty years had he been brought into contact with death. His father had slipped out of life when he was at school; and his mother had spared him all sight and sound of those last offices we render to the dead. Now however, she was thinking of herself rather than him. Her mother's death would be her loss, it would be nothing to the grandchild, while his strength would be something upon which she could lean. Mrs. Smart was making a tacit claim upon the manhood of her son and he had not yet understood; but as he walked after her into his grandmother's room and saw the pallid face upon the pillow, the face which had always had a smile and a kindly word for him, the real solemnity of the strange thing which was happening, gripped his mind.

"I'm very tired," the old woman said. "Give me something, Minty," and Mrs. Smart raising her head, administered some stimulating nourishment. "Ah, that's better. I was nearly forgetting what I had for you." She turned her head and looked up at the wardrobe. "There's a box on the top," she said, and Willy, who was tall, lifted down an old brass-bound desk. "It's my savings," she continued, in the low voice which was gradually sinking into a murmur, "and all things considered it's a tidy penny. It's for you, Minty, but open it when you are by yourself, for there's things in it as you may not want other people to see. The key's round my neck." She pulled feebly at her nightgown and

Mrs. Smart leaning over her, unbuttoned it at the neck, while Willy wondered whether dying people only talked of money and the disposition of property. What a hold life had on them, even on old women like his grandmother. He felt that if he were so unfortunate as to be dying, he would be too angry with fate to care very much what became of his belongings, but his grandmother was evidently resigned. Did resignation then come with age? To be resigned, what a thought! To be willing to give up going hither and yon, to be willing to lie still! He shivered slightly. How terrible, how horrible was Death.

On Mrs. Lovell's withered neck, from a piece of tape hung a foreign-looking brass key. Mrs. Smart lifted it gently away and put it in her pocket; and as she did so, thanked her mother with a kiss. Later on she would be glad of the money, but at the moment her mind was full of more emotional matters. What does money matter, when it is life that is in question?

"Move the candle so as I can see you, Minty," said the old woman, and the other pulled her chair forward. It was of horsehair with wooden arms and had always stood by the head of Mrs. Lovell's bed. Minty wheeled it down the room until her mother's eyes could rest upon it as she lay, and then seated herself with the brass-bound desk in her lap. The room was dimly lighted by a single candle, and on the further wall the shadow of the

old four-poster grew monstrous, as a draught fluttered the tiny flame. The light fell full upon Mrs. Smart's face and buxom figure, upon her healthy colour, and tear-dimmed eyes. The dying woman, silent now because she had said her say, and because she was very tired, lay looking at her, at this satisfactory daughter, this child who had never caused her a moment's anxiety. She was sorry to be going on, to be leaving her. She thought of the baby that had been, the child, the winsome girl, and realised that she was leaving more than the farm behind.

Tamsin who, doubt dispelled, had followed Minty and her son into the sick-room, rose to make up the fire. She and Willy were sitting in the shadow of the great bed, listening to the quick voice of the little American clock. Except for that, a hush had fallen upon the room and its inmates, the hush of a great expectancy.

Mrs. Lovell let her eyelids droop. She was growing sleepy and what did it matter if they closed? Already Minty's face was becoming shadowy, but it did not matter. It would never matter any more.

Suddenly Tamsin laid her hand on Willy Smart's arm. "Take your mother away," she whispered, and he rose bewildered and uncertain. "Take her away and be good to her," and at last he understood.

Mrs. Smart let him lead her out of the room.

She went leaning on his arm, but unconscious of the tender support, unconscious of his presence.

In the kitchen the fire was burning brightly, casting a fine glow upon the freshly ruddled bricks, and shining on the time-polished stools and settle. Mrs. Smart's eye rested instinctively upon the little stool that had been hers and as instinctively her gaze travelled on to the dresser. There in its accustomed corner stood the cracked yellow bowl with the blue band, the bowl which as a little girl she had fetched evening after evening for her mother to fill. Her mother! In a moment the surge of old memories had broken the ice about her heart and she was sobbing in Willy's arms.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN called upon to decide where her mother should be buried Mrs. Smart had hesitated. Her father lay in Ashwater churchyard; but from what Mrs. Lovell had said, it was more than dubious whether she would like her resting-place to be beside him. She had not given any instructions, she had left her daughter to deal with the matter; and Minty, shaken by her sudden, unexpected, poignant death, and for once in her life uncertain, had had the sharp edge taken off her grief by the necessity for this troublesome consideration. In the end she had decided that it could not make any difference. Inasmuch as she was their daughter they had been one flesh, and in the flesh they might sleep together. If when the resurrection came they felt any annoyance at finding themselves side by side—well, the resurrection was probably a long way off, and they would have had time by then to adjust their differences, or if they were insuperable, to make other arrangements. Minty did not think, even if they rose together, that it would be necessary for them to remain together. Moreover, and this clinched the matter, as the grave was theirs, paid for with their money, it was only fitting that they should make use of it.

The long frost broke upon New Year's eve and Mrs. Lovell was laid beside her husband on a day full of cold sunshine, when the birds released from their fears of starvation were trilling out a recollection of last year's mating songs. The little churchyard in the hollow, with its innumerable inscribed slabs, this mortal forlornly protesting its immortality, lay bathed in light; and Willy Smart, listening to the service, thinking of the dead woman, and of that chain of life the beginning of which was lost in the darkness of far-off yesterdays, the final link of which, so far, was himself, glanced at his mother, his poor grieving mother, and saw that she was older than he had thought. In her mourning dress, the red of her cheeks deepened by wind and weeping, her tread heavy and springless, she seemed to have left behind the authoritativeness of her middle-age and to be leaning on his youth and strength. Hitherto her will had been his law, but the man was pushing his way out of the cocoon of youth. It is not by thinking that growth comes, but through experience; and one eventful night had added a cubit to Willy's stature. As he led his mother away after that first rattle of earth upon the coffin lid, his own young spirit was a-shudder at the inexorableness of death and yet he could begin to talk; and as the new-made grave receded and the everyday sweetnesses of home drew nearer, could talk with a growing cheerfulness.

During the days that intervened between her

mother's death and burial, Mrs. Smart had felt but little curiosity respecting the contents of the brass-bound desk. The turning of a key would have put her in possession of the money, would have made her wise concerning those things she "might rather other people did not see"; but the key remained in her pocket, the desk lay unopened in a drawer. For what were legacies to her, when only a few yards away the giver of them lay cold and stiff, when by stepping across the little landing she could still look upon the dear dead face?

But once at home again, with the blinds up, the sunshine pouring in and Eva's face, Eva's sweet June-rose face, opposite her across the luncheon table, and the desk took on a new significance. It had been her mother's last gift, a casket that dead fingers had filled and locked for her, a thing unspeakably precious as containing that mother's last message.

She shut herself into her bedchamber that afternoon with the feeling that after days of stress and nights of sorrow, here peace awaited her. The familiar hideousness of the room with its big four-poster, its cheap flowered paper, its imitation lace curtains, was soothing to its owner. For many years these pieces of furniture had been part of her daily life; she had bought them with money that she had saved, and each represented a triumph either of bargaining or self-denial. She looked about her with an appraising eye. Eva had cleaned

and rubbed and polished, and the place had a cleanly air which to Mrs. Smart was delightful. It cheered her as nothing else could have done. The door handle shone, the grate shone, the furniture shone, each fold of the curtains had been calculated, the pictures hung exactly straight, everything was as she liked to see it.

Mrs. Smart thought she would take the opportunity of being by herself to examine her mother's gift; and that she might be secure from interruption, she turned the key in the bedroom lock. The similarity of the action carried her thoughts back to the day on which she had discovered the jewels, and thus reminded of their existence she went across to the mantel-shelf. The treasure! All thought of it had been washed out of her mind by the waters of sorrow; but now that she remembered, she would assure herself of its safety, for who knew what might not have happened during her absence. Pushing up the roof of the Swiss chalêt, therefore, she lifted out her husband's letters and laid a sensitive finger upon the other packet. It was just as she had left it, cotton-wool with a concealed heart of vari-coloured fire, cotton wool that fitted into and filled the old envelope. "Letters from the children," she murmured, and seeing in the inscription something amusing, smiled to herself. She had outwitted the burglar and that alone was a humorous thing to have done, but to have done it with these simple materials,—this worn envelope, this

commonplace inscription, this foolishly fragile box! It was really a sort of joke, one which she could enjoy by herself, one of those funny, vulgar stories which she knew and laughed at when alone, but which she never, never thought of relating to her children.

It was her habit of an afternoon to push aside the feather bed—that bed which she shook up every morning of her healthy life, and stretch herself upon the mattress. There she slept or rested for some half-hour or so, rising refreshed and ready for further exertion. She now made room for herself under the eider-down, and putting the precious desk on an adjacent chair, prepared to investigate its contents. It was of walnut wood, a costly toy, but strong as well as handsome. As far back as she could remember she had known this desk with its shining bands of metal, its beautiful dark grained wood. The sight of it had always brought back her London home, for it had stood in a room on the ground floor, its bright lock on a level with childish eyes, its rounded top rising above them. In those days it had contained paper and other treasures; paper, an occasional sheet of which had been given her to scribble on, and treasures of mother-o'-pearl which, when she was very good, had been displayed to her wondering eyes. Once more it contained a treasure, a treasure which as a reward was to be given her. The key turned as if the old and intricate lock had been lately oiled, but

instead of the mother-o'-pearl fishes and bobbins which she had somehow vaguely expected to see, the desk held two well-filled envelopes, them and nothing more. They lay, a white patch on the blue velvet of the interior, the top one open and bare of writing, the other carefully sealed and directed.

Mrs. Smart picked up the large open envelope, and it crackled under her fingers. Its contents were quite evidently bank notes. As she took it she noticed the direction of the other:—"To my daughter, Mrs. Smart. To be opened after my death," and paused, wondering what secret lay hidden in its discreet folds. But the money was, at least for the moment, of greater interest to her; and her hands trembled a little, as she pulled a thick wad out of the envelope. She had been feeling tired. Her back had ached, her eyes had ached, her head had ached, but these things were forgotten as she spread out the notes and began to count them.

That on the top was for a hundred pounds! She had never before seen such a thing, never before held so much money in her hand. With quickened interest she turned back the first piece of flimsy paper, only, however, to find under it another precisely similar. Two hundred pounds! She had fancied her mother might leave her as much as that, as much but hardly more. It was not so very long since the old lady had bought that slip of copse and the twenty-acre field. To do so had taxed her resources to the utmost, or Minty thought it had, and

yet beneath these two bank notes were others, several others. She counted them hurriedly, noting their value as she did so. Ten notes and each for a hundred pounds! Hardly able to believe in her good fortune she sat up and counted the notes again. But she had not made a mistake. In spite of that twenty-acre field, of trade depression and hard times, her mother had left her a thousand pounds! Her eyes filled with sudden tears for she knew, none better, all that had gone to the saving of those ten notes. She thought of the constant self-denial, no fire until the weather was bitter, no luxuries, never a new frock or bonnet or armchair, no change, no amusement; but seven working days in the week, and to each hour its allotted task. The old bones must have cried for rest, the old feet must have ached with age, and yet there had been no pause. Mrs. Lovell, sacrificing her bodily comfort that she might add shilling to shilling and pound to pound, had found a pleasure in so doing. She had hoarded with silent undemonstrative zeal, had kept it a secret until her death, and given without expectation of thanks. Minty herself would have done as much for Willy or Eva, and would have done it in the same way. Her heart ached afresh, for truly she and her mother had been of the same flesh and blood; and now she might never tell her how well she understood.

She lay back on her pillow, the notes between her fingers and the difficult tears of middle age on

her cheeks. Her mother had never failed her. She had gone to her in every difficulty, had gone as a matter of course and had accepted, as children do, whatever came from the parental hand. And now? A sob broke the silence of the room. The heart is for ever young, and the Minty who mourned her mother and cried after the protective, governing hand, was Minty the child.

The Smarts were, for their position, fairly well-to-do. The house they lived in was their own, Mrs. Smart had an income of four hundred a year and the farm, fifty acres of freehold land, belonged to her. It is true that this latter paid only a trifle of rent, but thanks to the army of red-coated houses which was invading Surrey, land was going up in value. Mrs. Smart having no use for the place, until it should be worth selling, was content that Tamsin Tinney should farm it; but she looked forward to a time when the "Old Meadow Estate" should be cut up into lots and leased for building. Ground rents were her ambition, ground rents which should enrich her children's children; and as she twisted the notes between her fingers, it was of land and houses that she thought. But she could not build, she did not wish to buy, and a mortgage therefore was what remained to her. She made up her mind that the thousand pounds should be invested in a safe four-per-cent mortgage, and that she would see her lawyer on the subject without loss of time.

The problem of what to do with her legacy having been satisfactorily solved, the question of another asset came up for consideration. The Swiss chalêt, pretty dusty bit of rubbish, stood sideways on the mantel-shelf, its lid raised, its contents exposed to view. There was no longer any reason for her to hide her find in the old envelope; it would on the whole, thought Minty shrewdly, be safer to lock it away in her mother's desk; for the contents of that little heavy box having been known to the dead woman only, the jewellery for all that anybody knew, might have been there when she received it.

If the question ever arose, her mother's desk would supply her with an explanation.

Pulling the cotton wool out of the envelope, she carefully unfolded it. The pieces of jewellery, nested as she had left them, flashed up at her, the tiara, collar, bow-brooch, the deep flame of the green opal, the gleam of emeralds, the wine-dark shadow of the amethyst. For a moment she lost herself in simple admiration, and then one by one, she laid the scintillating ornaments on the worn blue velvet of the old desk. Tharp had told her that they were worth a great deal of money and her first, fairly modest, estimate of them had been amended. She even wondered whether they might not prove as valuable as the wad of flimsy paper she still held in her left hand. But that of course was absurd. Jewels worth a thousand pounds! Surely no one

would be so foolish as to lock up a thousand pounds of capital in a few bright and pretty stones.

On the dark velvet the diamonds sparkled like dew-drops cupped in a poppy leaf and Mrs. Smart, bending over them, suddenly became aware of the other envelope, the envelope sealed and directed to herself, which, in the excitement of counting the notes, she had forgotten.

"To my daughter, Mrs. Smart. To be opened after my death."

She disengaged it from the crowding jewels and without apprehension slit open the flap. Within was a single sheet of paper, closely covered with Mrs. Lovell's rather laboured writing; and at the sight of it, Minty began to wonder what it was that her mother had thought of sufficient importance to communicate in this manner. It occurred to her that after all she knew very little about either her father or her mother, and that it was surely unusual to be entirely without relatives. Hitherto she had taken things for granted, had supposed an answer to the whys and whens of her incurious mind, but the crabbed handwriting made her suddenly afraid. Mrs. Lovell seldom put pen to paper, so seldom that her daughter felt only a serious matter could have induced her to write this letter, this letter which was to tell, after her death, what when living she had withheld. Slowly and almost unwillingly, she unfolded the paper and began to read.

OLDMEADOW FARM, ASHWATER.

Dear Minty,

I'm writing this because perhaps you've a right to know, seeing as after all he was your father.

He was a good match for me, being a lawyer, and me a farmer's daughter; but it's nothing to do with that, though like should marry like and a lady might have kept him straight.

Jim was a lawyer who took other people's money, money as he'd been trusted with, and spent it. He took it to speculate with and he meant to put it back; he was one as always meant all right. But he was found out before he had done so and sent to prison.

My father lent me the money to start the little farm and I paid it back before he died.

When Jim was let out he came back to me; and being married, we made the best of it till he died.

I thought perhaps, him being a gentleman and you hard to please, as I'd better let you have your choice; and that was why when you left school, I let the fishing. I had hoped one of the lads about would have suited you, but you never wanted any but Richard and he was straight, though he was a gentleman.

I think that's all. I was sorry for your father and I did my duty by him. I did what I could; but forgiving never came easy to none of us.

Your loving mother,

SARAH LOVELL.

Mrs. Smart dropped the letter into her lap. "Poor father," she said, and as the puzzle of the past unravelled itself before her pitiful gaze, she said it again. "My poor, poor father."

She did not pity the proud woman disgraced by another's weak incompetence, embittered because she could not forgive; but she understood at last that her mother had once been like herself, handsome, ambitious, and full of energy. Once, but that was long ago.

"She shouldn't have told me," she cried. "If she had been the one to take the money she would not have told me." But her mother had been honest to the uttermost farthing. She had been so honest, that she had not dared to keep the story of her husband's wrong-doing from his child.

"What does it matter now?" said Minty, tearing the letter across and across. "He is dead and nobody knows."

She could not feel that her father's wrong-doing concerned her in any way; as long as people did not know that he had yielded to temptation, she and hers were not disgraced; indeed as matters were, her only feeling was one of sympathy. The poor fellow had meant to put the money back, had hoped no doubt to make a fortune, had been thinking of his wife and child, how then could that child do aught but pity him? She wished she did not know, or that she could obliterate the story from her mind. At least she would take good care not to pass it on.

Her mother's anxious conscientiousness might have done harm to her father's memory; and Minty found that she was suddenly unable to think of her with quite the old reverence and affection. The man whom Mrs. Lovell had not been able to forgive, was her child's father and that child thought his dishonesty a matter of small moment, an old story which should have been forgotten these many years back, forgotten and forgiven. Her poor, poor father, how well she now remembered the look which she had not understood! Ah, if she had but known, she who had thought he was grown too old to romp, too old to care for the society of a noisy, merry, little girl. During that last year of his life she had seen so little of him, she who could have sympathised. And now it was too late, he was dust these many years, his misdeeds and his repentance alike forgotten. His daughter could not know that she had been very little to her father, that what Jim Lovell had wanted had been his wife's love and forgiveness,—the unattainable.

CHAPTER VIII

It had not taken Mrs. Smart long to realise that the diamonds, sapphires, rubies and other stones, with which the six ornaments were studded would be more valuable to her as mere loose gems, than while held by the tiny claws and clasps of their settings. Her ingenious mind suggested that some half-dozen, empty, chip boxes which thrift had put by until they should be needed, might be utilised to hold the disengaged stones; and by prolonging the period of her afternoon rest, she was able to give half an hour every day, to the task which she had set herself. A knife, a sharp iron skewer and a pair of scissors were her tools, and day after day the work of disintegration went on, the glittering heaps augmenting until at last the bent and battered settings had given up every atom of their treasure. What to do with the ill-used metal Mrs. Smart did not know. The Laurels was a corner house with, in front, an uninterrupted view across some fields. These fields belonged to a gin-distiller, whose comfortable mansion, lying behind copses and shrubberies, was out of sight; and they were fenced from the road by grey park palings. It was the habit of the neighbourhood to dump behind these palings, anything of which it imperatively de-

sired to be rid. Mrs. Smart had known a well-kept lobster and more than one unpleasant tin of potted meat to go that way; and she fixed a meditative eye upon the grey wood, she even went further and took into consideration an elm in a row of trees at the end of the fields. The children trespassing in search of flowers and eggs had described to her the hole, too deep for them to probe, which they had found in the rugged bole of the tree. But their mother could not think that either place would be quite safe. The elm, rotten at heart, might be cut down or uprooted by a storm, and anything dropped behind the palings might be found, and if so questions would be asked, inquiries made. It was evident that she must wait. Meanwhile with heavy foot she trod them close; and as they were of a gold without much alloy, it was not difficult to crush them together.

Mrs. Smart was never tired of pouring the released stones through her fingers, of letting the sun bring out the colours that their facets held, of setting them forth in rows on the blue velvet of the desk. She was like a child with a new toy and though she might wonder what she would eventually do with them, she was content to bide her time. She lived, therefore, her two lives, her busy everyday existence and this other of secret joys and hopes, and saw nothing strange in the combination. Loneliness had never seemed to her other than the normal condition of humanity. Not even her hus-

band had held the key to her thoughts; and she took it for granted that she resembled in this as in other things, the rest of the world.

One frosty night towards the end of January, evening of a day on which she had successfully released a whole row of different sized diamonds from the left wing of the tiara, Mrs. Smart with freshly washed hands was waiting for a moment in the dining-room. Her thoughts were full of the dinner which she had just cooked and which Annie was dishing up, and her eyes travelled happily about the terra-cotta room with its chocolate paint. The good woman's possessions gave her many a moment of simple pleasure. To her thinking the pilastered clock of black marble on the mantel-shelf, the gilt-edged mirror behind it, the green leather chairs, and the solid mahogany table set out with shining electro—for they did not use their silver—the brightly burning gas-jets and the fire on the red-tiled hearth, made an attractive whole which she would not willingly have exchanged for any other dining-room in Eastham. Intrinsic beauty was nothing to Mrs. Smart, she valued her possessions because they were hers, a part of her daily life, made dear to her by familiarity and long association. As she stood looking about her approvingly, the postman's rat-tat broke in upon her thoughts and she hurried out. She liked to answer the door. She said that as she only kept one servant, there were plenty of other things for the girl to do. But

that was only an excuse. Mrs. Smart was curious and liked to know all that was happening; and she learnt quite a number of things by going herself in reply to errant knocks and rings.

This evening a letter from her brother-in-law, Col. William Smart, a flimsy grey-lined envelope with an Australian postmark, lay in the box. The children were up stairs, the boy changing into an old coat, the girl prinking before her glass, and Mrs. Smart was at leisure. She took the letter back into the dining-room; and with the comfortable sigh of a woman, who is at the same time, both tired and contented, dropped into one of the much-buttoned armchairs and began to read.

William had been the only one of the Smart family who, in this world of little love, had cared sufficiently for Richard to come and see him after his marriage. He was a soldier in the Indian Army and not often at home; but a long leave never passed without his spending a few days of it at Eastham. The man of the world had held the winner of prizes and scholarships in wondering esteem, and though the one had prospered while the other was labouring for a thankless wage, the successful man had continued to look up to the unsuccessful. The last time, some eight years previously, that he had been in England, the brothers had gone for a walking tour in Hampshire. The weather had been propitious, the roads good and when, some months later, Minty overwhelmed with grief, had written to tell

him of Richard's death, Colonel Smart could look back thankfully to that fortnight of kind companionship.

On obtaining the command of his regiment, he had retired from the service. Having some years previously invested his savings in a Ceylon plantation, he now took over the management of it. The man was fortunate as well as shrewd; and after some years of profitable work, had been able to sell it advantageously, and to think of coming home.

During the last six months, as he informed his sister-in-law, he had been in Australia, touring among mines and diggings; but though he liked the country, he could not find it in his heart to settle out of England, hoped indeed to be back that summer. He wanted to see his godson, young William, wanted Minty's advice as to where he should look for a house, wanted to see if Eva's eyes were still as soft as when she had persuaded an old uncle to take her to the pantomime. The letter was characteristic of the man who had written it, a cheery, good-hearted effusion, which concealed as much as it said. But Minty could read between the lines. He was coming home, but she knew that he felt older, that he had been thinking of the gaps in the circle, of the brother who had been his earliest chum, his life-long friend, and who would not be there to bid him welcome.

Mrs. Smart looked across at the other much-buttoned chair, Richard's chair. She was not psychic.

She had no feeling that the dead man might possibly be with her though invisible, but she believed in the "resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come," and she believed, not because she was a weak woman clinging for comfort to the promises of religion, but because she was simple and credulous.

A rustle of silk preceded Eva's appearance and the young girl, looking in her half-mourning unusually refined, pushed open the door.

Custom had become less rigorous with regard to such matters, but Mrs. Smart wore a crape-trimmed gown and would have liked her daughter to have done the same. She looked with disapproval at the girlish figure in its black skirt and white lace blouse, but though she blamed she understood. Unrelieved black did not suit Eva, it added years to her age and dimmed her beauty, what more natural therefore, than that the girl should decline to wear it? But so smart a blouse! Eva had bought it at Jones and Higgins' sale on the preceding Monday and had spoken of keeping it for the summer. Mrs. Smart's heart misgave her as she noted the details of her daughter's toilet, the ribbon in her hair, the locket on its thin gold chain, the yellow roses carefully pinned against the curve of her young breast. Eva had not much pocket money and it was still January. She had not bought those roses. But her mother, though she watched, did not interfere unnecessarily, did not ask intrusive questions. She

only feared. Since the skating party at Eastborough, Eva had taken unusual pains with herself; could it be possible that the time had come for her as it comes for us all, that the one man had appeared, the one whose image magnified by loving eyes, was to shut all the others out of sight?

As her daughter opened the door, Mrs. Smart rose and went over to make the tea, but her manner was pre-occupied. She was thinking of Archibald Flowerdew, the young schoolmaster. Though he was without private means he would not be a bad match for her daughter. His position was good, he had taken honours at college and his connections were well-to-do. As to the practical side of the matter well, if Eva fancied him, they might depend upon her to help; and her thoughts flew hot-foot, not to her mother's honourable legacy, but to those heaps of beautiful blue and red and white stones, now shut away in their chip boxes within the locked desk. Mrs. Smart wore the key of that desk about her neck as Mrs. Lovell had done, and for the same reason.

Annie Price brought in the small shoulder of New Zealand mutton, the mint sauce and the baked potatoes, and the little family sat down to its meal.

"I have just had a letter from your Uncle William," Mrs. Smart said as she passed Willy his tea. He being the man of the house, was carver, while Eva helped the potatoes and passed the sauce. "He

has been in Australia for the last few months, but is coming home this summer."

Willy looked up from his work. "In Australia," he said keenly. "Did he say where?"

"Oh yes; he named some places of which I had never heard."

Willy finished carving for his mother and sister, and then laid down the knife and fork. "Where is the letter?" said he. Its contents were of more importance to him than his food.

"Oh Willy," said his mother deprecatingly and wished that she had not mentioned it; but she gave him the sheet of flimsy paper. After all, Colonel Smart was his god-father and a comparatively wealthy man, who knew what he might not do for this good-looking nephew of his? She took her own plate from Eva's careful hands, and began her so-called dinner. Her hopes were for her children, for their success in life, for their happiness; she asked of fate nothing for herself.

"How old is Uncle William, Mother?" said her son, as he restored the letter to its envelope. He had read it devouringly and now, a brooding look on his dark face, was turned back to the table. There were two Willys, the dreamer of quiet hours and a gay light-hearted boy; but the one who questioned, was the one his mother feared, as we are all apt to fear that which is unknown but evidently greater than ourselves. Mrs. Smart liked to think

of her son as a youth upon whom the city had already laid its appropriating finger, one who would be content to realise the ambitions of ordinary men, for these things were within her comprehension.

"How old is your Uncle William? Let me see, he is two years senior to your father, who would have been fifty-six this March. He must be fifty-eight."

"Fifty-eight," said Willy slowly. "He has had to wait fifty-eight years before he was able to go where he liked, before he had the money to do it. It's a long time."

"But he has been about a lot," suggested Eva.

"He has been sent about," corrected her brother. "He hasn't been free to go, to just go."

"And now that he can please himself," said the mother, "he talks, as any sensible man would, of coming home."

Her son raised his flint-grey eyes and fixed them on her for a moment, but he said no more. He had already begun to realise, that what he most desired would hardly be for his mother's happiness.

"I suppose he will come and stay with us?" Eva said pensively. Matters of more importance than the visit of an elderly uncle were occupying her attention; but she wished to hide the dreaming thoughts that possessed her. From her mother's eyes she hid them about as much as she would have done if she had sung them aloud, but brothers are less observant.

"But of course," said Willy impatiently. "He wants to come, he says so, and Uncle William always means what he says."

"He may want to come," replied Mrs. Smart, "but you must remember that he may find it painful. He was very fond of your father."

"But now—I want him," said youth insistently, and the mother felt a slight stirring of jealousy. She no longer sufficed her son, he wanted more than she could give him, more than she had to give. But what was it, this something which she did not possess and which her child desired?

"Mother," interposed Eva, whose thoughts had strayed from the contemplation of her uncle's possible visit, "do you know, you have never told us what was in Granny's box?"

Mrs. Smart felt suddenly uncomfortable. "No," said she, and not being good at subterfuge, said no more.

"And she won't," said her son, who had begun his dinner and was making up for lost time. On the surface his moods were apt to succeed one another with bewildering rapidity, the one to which he was constant being kept out of sight. He understood his mother fairly well and it amused him to chaff her. Secretiveness was one of her weaknesses; but why shouldn't she keep things to herself if she wanted to, the dear old mater? "You couldn't tell us about it, now could you, Mother dear?"

Mrs. Smart smiled back at her favourite child, thankful to him for having unconsciously come to the rescue. "Oh, Willy, Willy!" she said, and shook at him an admonishing finger.

"But we can guess," continued the culprit. "Now Eva, what do you think is in the box?"

"Two hundred pounds in five pound notes!" said his sister after due consideration.

"I say a hundred sovereigns in a leather bag. Come, now, Mother, wasn't that the figure? And you'll let me invest it, won't you? A safe thing, safe as houses and seven per cent—there!"

"Seven per cent indeed!" Mrs. Smart knew better than that.

"Well, two and a half then, anything to please you."

"I wouldn't trust a boy like you with my investments," protested his mother with amiable but sincere contempt. It was difficult for her to realise that he had twenty-three years to his credit and might be thought a man.

"Boy indeed, when if you could only be persuaded to come down with the cash, I might be on my own."

"And who'd trust you with any business?"

Willy began to count with his fingers. "Dobell, Matthews, Chippendale, Rand, Coward, Murrow——"

His mother looked impressed. "Seriously, Willy?"

"They've promised it,—on the train, you know. Oh, that first-class season was a fine idea of yours, it has helped me to no end of good friends." He was speaking the truth. His boyish gaiety, tempered as it was with appreciation of their greater experience, had won him the suffrage of his elders; and especially of those upon whom the monotony of their money-getting pressed most heavily. He had been a ray of sunshine in the greyness of their day and several of them really meant, when he went into business on his own account, to give him a helping hand. "Honestly, Mother, I could begin in a small way. Addison will be an authorised clerk before long and next year he thinks of setting up for himself. His father is finding the money, and he said something to me yesterday about fixing up a partnership."

"A partnership with Addison?"

"That was the idea."

"Humph!" Mrs. Smart had seen the young man in question, a good lad but dull, too dull to be anything but steady and discreet. To a certain extent she approved of him. Her Willy was too eager, he had not the ballast of the other. Yes, they might do worse than "fix up a partnership." As she ruminated, weighing the two youths in the scales of her judgment, Eva's voice broke the silence. The girl was as sweetly grave as her brother was buoyant, but she was, at least on the surface, far more tenacious. She wanted to know more about

Granny's box and she was not to be turned from her quest.

"But, Mother, you have not told us a single thing," she said, "and I am so much interested."

Mrs. Smart was at bay. "There was a letter from your grandmother," she said reluctantly. "It was about family affairs, things that concerned her and me, but which I trust may never concern you children. Also there was money."

"In gold?" said the girl. She thought that anything to do with family affairs must concern her as well as her mother; but she knew that mother too well, to try and wheedle out of her more than she wished to reveal.

"No, not in gold and not in fivers. Now that is all I'm going to tell you."

"It would be so much more interesting, Mother," said Eva, feeling that she must make the small remonstrance, "if you would always tell us everything."

Her mother glanced at her shrewdly. She knew more about her daughter's affairs than that daughter suspected. "I wonder if it would," she said thoughtfully. "I know a good deal about other people, but I wonder if they would be interested to hear it." She had detected the little seedling of rebellion and meant to put that heavy foot of hers upon it. "Where they go for their walk on a Sunday afternoon for instance, and who they go with."

The girl coloured lightly. "Oh, Mother, you are too bad," she said and, her thoughts deflected from the issue of the moment, she half-smiled at her, entreating her with soft eyes to have mercy. It was a fact that she was apt, when walking, to be met surprisingly often by some one or other of her male acquaintances, but could she help it? Sunday afternoons were dull, or would have been if she had stayed at home, dozing over a novel. Besides it was stuffy indoors, and she needed fresh air and exercise. But how did her mother know that whether she needed it or not, she also had companionship?

Mrs. Smart, the silent struggle at an end, smiled back at her and smiled with confidence. The girl in spite of her adorable little air of dependence and docility, was perfectly well able to take care of herself. She conquered by her softness, by her quick shy smiles, her gratitude. It was so very pleasant to be appreciated, to be liked, and it was so surprising. Eva's attitude towards the other sex was full of an unconscious flattery; but her heart, cool in its chamber of dreams, lay sleeping. Mrs. Smart wondered for the hundredth time, whether the Prince was come, the Prince who was to kiss it awake, but she did not voice her wonder. Instead she let the talk slip back into everyday channels.

Annie Price brought in the banana cream and removed the meat. Willy, strolling down Fleet Street on the preceding day, had seen a coster cry-

ing the yellow fruit at six a penny, and had bought a dozen for his mother. To her credit as a housekeeper be it said, Mrs. Smart knew the difference between the cooking and eating varieties of the fruit; and the banana cream—cream that had been skimmed from the morning's milk—was the result.

That evening as they sat about the fire, the mother knitting socks for her boy, Eva on a little stool sewing, and the boy with his head in his hands and his strange eyes fixed upon the little dancing flames, a ring, the ring of a visitor, broke in upon their various and very different thoughts.

"I expect it is only Froggie Murrow or Bertie Chippendale," Willie said, and rising went to open the door. The youths in question often dropped in for an hour's chat or a game of cards; but Mrs. Smart knew from the look upon her daughter's face that the visitor was not likely to be either of them, and she neither looked nor felt surprised when Willy returning ushered in a tall fair man.

"It's Flowerdew, Mother," he announced in his gay young voice. He liked society and anybody would have been welcome, but he was a little surprised that this particular man should have elected to come and look him up.

Nor had the two much in common. The ten years that lay between them had brought sophistication to Flowerdew, and Willy was to him only a raw, unpolished youth, whose society must be endured for his sister's sake. Flowerdew, whose

languid manner covered firm decisions, would have cheerfully endured for that same sake, other and greater things than a little uncongenial society.

He had taken as a matter of course the other much-buttoned armchair; and as he leant back in an attitude which showed the grace of his figure, Mrs. Smart could not but notice that the head above the tired-looking blue eyes, was well developed and very broad. They had not hitherto met, and she was therefore peculiarly interested in everything that concerned him. For a moment it had seemed to her strange that Eva should have taken to such a man; but when he turned to the young girl on her stool in the corner, his superciliousness dropped from him. It was evident to her mother that Eva felt the flattery of his attitude; and that she thought him vastly superior to the budding city men by whom she was surrounded.

He had a fine head and deep-set eyes, but Mrs. Smart was not so well pleased with the rest of the face. Below the eyes were cheeks too pallid in hue, cheeks that told of late hours and an indoor life, and the mouth had a queer twist. It was not a good-tempered mouth and it was self-indulgent. Mrs. Smart fancied that whosoever married Archibald Flowerdew would be seeking trouble, and she looked anxiously from his face to that of her daughter. Eva's cheeks and brow and chin had all the roundness of budding womanhood, but there was promise in the firm soft lips and in the faintly indi-

cated line of the jaw. She was not clever but she was decided and persistent. Mrs. Smart would rather she did not marry Mr. Flowerdew; but if she should elect to do so, her mother felt that she would make the best of him and of her life with him.

The young people discussed the prospect—a prospect which the renewed hard weather was holding out—of further skating and spoke of the next subscription dance. The last had been on Christmas Eve, and there Flowerdew had met his 'one maid.'

"Who gets up these dances?" he asked lazily.

"Mr. Cole, the dentist who lives on the hill."

"Really?" He seemed surprised. "Sporting chap your dentist, ought to be given a vote of thanks or a teapot or something."

"It's jolly good of him to take all the trouble he does," said Willy.

"And everybody goes?"

"Rather."

Responding to a glance from his mother the young host rose and went to one of the cupboards in the sideboard for whiskey, while Eva fetched water and glasses. If a young man called during the evening, this bottle invariably made its appearance, but Mrs. Smart preferred those youths who refused the slight hospitality. "For," said she, "boys should not drink spirits."

Mr. Flowerdew, however, was hardly a boy. He helped himself to a three-finger peg and added a

little water. "Good stuff this to keep out the cold," he said, looking at Eva over the top of his glass. "Here's to our dances. You won't forget, will you Miss Smart, that you've promised me the first waltz as well as those others later on in the evening?"

"I won't forget," said Eva sweetly. She had not promised anything of the sort, they had not even spoken of their programmes; but she knew that she would give him all the waltzes he demanded, indeed if he asked, might give him more than waltzes.

The young man looking at her, made mental note of the fact that she was in semi-mourning. He was of course going to send her flowers for the dance, and he thought they should be lilies, a spray of lilies. Her emblem was the rose, the full warm flower of midsummer, an English rose; but white roses or tube-roses, no. And after all though they did not represent her, lilies were dear little people and very sweet. Yes, it should be lilies, lilies of the valley.

Willy, as in duty bound, went with him to the door, but the two men did not linger in talk. "It's very cold," the boy said as he came back into the dining-room, "and the stars are simply wonderful. Well mater, what do you think of him?"

"Oh, give me time, dear, this is the first time I've seen him," and Mrs. Smart, rolling up her knitting, slipped it into the tall basket that stood between the coalscuttle and the sideboard.

"I don't think I liked him. He's jolly patronising."

Eva looked up quickly. "Wait till you know him better."

"I don't fancy that I want to, he's too la-di-da for me; and I can't imagine what he dropped in here for to-night. I never asked him to."

Mrs. Smart did not think it necessary to inform her unobservant son, that the young man had come to ask Eva to keep him a special dance, and that he had effected his object.

"We shall probably see more of him," she remarked, as she rose from her chair. The day had rounded to its close, a long, happy, busy day, no more to be regretted than the ending of a long, happy, busy life. "He told me that he had accepted the post of English master in that big school at Eastborough, and I said we should be very pleased if he ever cared to look us up."

"But he won't," said Willy confidently. "Eastborough College is quite three miles from here, and Flowerdew isn't the kind to go out bicycling after his dinner."

But his sister smiled to herself and gave her mother a little grateful hug. She did not realise that her wishes had been interpreted, she only thought that Mrs. Smart had been unusually appreciative, and that her undeclared lover had been invited to the house—for his own sake!

CHAPTER IX

Colonel William Smart, fifth son of old Sir Jocelyn, was a man of sense rather than ability. It being impressed upon him from his youth up, that he would have to make his own way in the world, he had perceived that a pension for his old age and a sufficient income in his middle age, were matters which it behoved him to obtain. A commission in the Indian Army promising both, he had early bidden a philosophic farewell to his native land and promising himself whatever of fighting and shikari were to be obtained, had voyaged east. He was the cheeriest of men, with a something, possibly of manner, certainly of temperament, which procured him the friendship of those whom he honoured with his liking, and the respect, though hardly perhaps the affection, of the rest of the world. If such a man had not married, it was because domesticity was alien to him, for of love he had had enough and to spare. To him it had been neither a tragedy nor a succession of episodes, but a part and a brilliant part of the pattern of life. He was a small man, with fine hands and feet, a strong personality in a little case. In his dark face, his eyes which must have been intended for hazel gave an impression as of opaque green, the green of jade; but his

black lashes were so discreet, the eyes so deeply set, that casual observers generally supposed them a light brown.

Most of this man's life had of course been spent in India, the India of the British Raj and he was now returning to unmysterious England, the England of country houses, of little pieces of land neatly fenced about, of elaborate gardens, over-civilisation and a pallid meat-eating folk. He was not sure, given his experience and experiences, that he was wise to do so; but wanderer as he was at heart, he yet longed to spend the last years of his life among his kindred; and though he was fifty-eight and a little tired, he supposed that once settled down, he would soon find things that it interested him to do and people that it would interest him to meet. Also he was his own master and when he had disposed of a certain piece of property, would have a comfortable income. He had enjoyed his time in the army, he had enjoyed his work on the plantation and now he would enjoy his leisure. Coming back, with England as his goal, he yet came slowly, spending a month or two in New Zealand, in Brazil, in Columbia; May, however, found him in Eastham and as cheerfully appreciative of its spring beauties, as he had been of the deeper-coloured glories of the tropics. For the suburb was at all times a pretty place, and the little strips of back garden having been planted with fruit trees, the front with flowering shrubs, laburnum, hawthorn, old-fashioned

purple laylock and American currant, in spring it was enchanting. In the tree-bordered fields opposite to The Laurels, the larks trilled all day long, the cuckoo called, and when night brought the revelation of the stars, the nightingale began with many breaks, his song of rapture.

Eight years, nearly nine, had come and gone since Colonel Smart had seen an English spring, since he had watched the apple trees blushing into bloom, and seen the brown earth hidden by the snow of fallen petals; and during the eight, nearly nine years, those human beings for whom as relatives, he had a kindly affection, had grown and changed. Minty was not very different, a little older, but still in her large and cheerful way a comely woman, but the children! The shyly smiling Eva had come to where the brook and river meet—and Willy! But Colonel Smart looked at his tall nephew with a faint sense of disappointment. As a youngster the boy had been charming, he was still charming, but—well, what was it? The service man looked the other over, wondering where he got his clothes. They were good clothes, they were serviceable clothes, they had even a little air of smartness—ah, that was it—of the wrong kind of smartness. But that was hardly the boy's fault, perhaps he went to a suburban tailor, to some little man in the Eastham High Street. Colonel Smart's own clothes came from a bow-fronted shop in Piccadilly, and he promised himself, when he knew the

boy a little better, to send him there for a suit. As a general rule it would of course be too expensive for him, but there must be others. He would inquire of brother officers at the Club, men who had not his private income and who yet always contrived to wear the right clothes. Willy was a Smart, every inch of him, but since his father's death he had been left to his own devices, and had very naturally approximated in dress and bearing to the people among whom he lived; but it was not too late, he was young yet, and the marks were not indelible.

Meanwhile he could not help seeing that if he had a liking for this nephew who was only a larger, younger edition of himself, to the nephew he loomed as the great man of the family. Eva listened to him as a sweet young girl listens to an elderly man who is also a guest, but Willy hung upon his words; and this was so encouraging that the Colonel began to wonder whether the garrulity of old age had not attacked him. The sacred book of his life had hitherto been for his own reading, but now chapter after chapter was begged from him, was eagerly studied and then stored in the memory-house of another. Colonel Smart could not but see that Willy was ill-suited for life in an office, indeed he thought it a pity the boy had not been allowed to go into the army. But in Mrs. Smart's estimation the services ranked with the upper classes. If his father had lived, the boy, against his mother's will,

might have found his way into one of them; but after his death the subject was not so much as mooted. A profession, if he liked, but not either of the services; and on the whole, though here she might have given way, she would rather that he did not go abroad. So the boy, to whom life under other skies, life vari-coloured and spent in the open, alone appealed, went day after day into a great city, taking with him the hope that presently he might make enough money to bid it an eternal farewell, and working well only because of that hope.

No wonder that his uncle's descriptions of the brown peoples and the yellow peoples, the Malays, the Lascars, and the Seedi-boys made Willy forget the food on his plate and the hour when he should go to bed. Even Eva, dreaming of her lover, sometimes put aside her pre-occupation to listen, while that lover, roused out of his insouciance, was frankly delighted, so much so indeed that he drew upon him the Colonel's attention.

So that was the young fellow of whom Minty had spoken to him. Not bad-looking and almost—perhaps quite—no, not quite a gentleman, but with very fair manners. A bit white about the gills, indoor life perhaps or midnight oil, still he was rather pallid. Of course the girl was too good for him, girls always were, at least in the estimation of fathers and uncles.

"And what did you do with yourself when you weren't busy on the estate?" Eva had inquired.

"Do?" Colonel Smart thought of the many things he had done, and made a hasty selection. "Oh, I used to look up a friend or—or do a bit of gemming."

"Gemming?" said Mrs. Smart, at once attracted by the word.

"There was a likely looking place by the river that ran at the bottom of my garden and I got one or two decent stones from it. I liked the uncertainty." He spoke as if apologetically and putting thumb and finger into a waistcoat pocket, took out a large dark-blue sapphire. "I bought a good many of my stones—oh, didn't you know? Yes, I have a collection—from the natives, but I found that on my own land."

The little party of five were sitting in the drawing-room; and Mrs. Smart putting out her hand for the stone, took it across to the three-armed brass chandelier that depended from plaster leaves in the centre of the ceiling. Eva being in favour of shaded light, the gas-globes were of crimson glass and only by standing directly under them was it possible to see clearly. "What is it?" said Mrs. Smart a little huskily. Her excitement was so strong that the breath fluttered in her throat. "I don't know anything about stones, I don't even know what this is."

"It's a sapphire."

"And are sapphires valuable?"

"One like this is. I've brought a lot back with

me. They'll sell better over here than they would have in Ceylon."

"But have you only those dark stones, uncle?" asked Eva, a critical note in her voice.

Colonel Smart flashed the gem about until the girl had to admit that there was beauty even in a sapphire. "I've others too," he said, "cat's-eyes and moonstones and star sapphires, oh, lots of them," and he brought some half-dozen out of the pocket which had held the sapphire. "I like to carry one or two about with me," he said. "There!" and he held up a cinnamon stone. "Isn't that a glorious bit of colour? Madeira isn't in the same room with it, eh, Minty?"

"Ah, that is prettier," said Eva, "a necklace of those now!"

Her uncle laughed at her. "I'm afraid you don't know much about stones. Wait a moment, though, and I'll show you something," and in two or three minutes he was back with a lump of dark ore about the size of a man's hand. "What do you think that is?" he said, and offered it to her.

Eva turned it about and from its rough surface gleams of iridescence shot darkly forth. "It's like peacocks' feathers," she said. "What is it, uncle?"

"It's what is called 'potch,' in other words it is opal in the rough, opal that hasn't yet crystallised into pinfire. I brought it down for your mother."

"It's lovely. What wonderful deep dark greens and blues."

"I'm going to have one side of it polished for you; and then you'll see, that it really is, as you say, 'lovely.'"

Mr. Flowerdew examined it with interest. "Where did you get it?" he asked.

"From the opal mines. I shipped a good deal of it home and have realised very fair prices on it."

But Mrs. Smart was only interested in stones similar to those locked away in the brass-bound desk. "Do you get diamonds out there?" she asked.

"Out where? Oh, Ceylon. I don't think so. A few from India but not many nowadays. The nearest thing to them is the white sapphire and it's not thought much of, though it was fashionable enough a season or two ago. As prices were ruling high that year, I sold what I had."

He sat down beside her on the green velvet sofa and began to discourse of gems. It was not a subject on which he often permitted himself to speak, though it was one upon which he could talk as a connoisseur. He had gone to Australia in order to visit the gold diggings and the opal mines, he had gone to Columbia to see the emerald mines, to Brazil after diamonds, and wherever he went, he had, when it was possible, bought carefully from the men upon the spot. His collection, as he called it, was now very valuable.

"I did not know you cared about such things,"

he said at last. The young people, dragging the reluctant Willy with them, had long since deserted the neighbourhood of the sofa and were now gathered about the piano. Their taste in music was expressed by the latest musical comedy, and Willy, whose voice was quite untrained, was singing to Eva's accompaniment, while Archibald Flowerdew, seated a little to one side, looked on in languid content.

"Well," said Minty, seizing her opportunity, "I don't know that I did, say a year ago; but circumstances alter cases."

Colonel Smart turned his jade-green eyes upon her, and there was a look of affection in the smile that narrowed their lids. If a woman is a good wife, mother, and manager, if she goes regularly to church and pays her bills, men are apt to accredit her with all the other virtues. William Smart would as soon have suspected his mother's veracity as that of his sister-in-law. He had known her for four and twenty years, and had learnt to think her admirable in all the relationships of life.

"Ah," he said pleasantly, and waited for her to continue. He could listen as well as talk.

"You remember how the children chaffed me on Sunday about the fortune which they declared my mother had left me in her desk?"

"I remember something about it, yes."

"Mother gave me the desk when she was dying,

and it proved to be half full of bits of coloured glass, cut like the stones you shewed us just now. I didn't tell the children, I just locked it up again and put it away; but I've often wondered about it, and now that you've told me all this about mines and gemming and so forth, I cannot help thinking that what I took for coloured glass may be something very different."

The Colonel was politeness itself. "I should like to see them," he said in his pleasant non-committal voice. He did not think it likely that his sister-in-law would have a hoard of precious stones, that such good things would be found in Eastham; her treasure probably consisted of beads that the older woman had imagined to be valuable, coloured quartz or pebble, bits of clear amber, polished fragments of rock crystal.

"I will fetch them, but——" she glanced towards the group at the piano. "Well, I should prefer to shew them to you in the dining-room. Eva dear," and she raised her voice, ruthlessly interrupting a song, "your uncle and I are going into the other room to talk business."

"Very well, Mother," and the girl struck another chord. She played with expression and inaccuracy; but as her lover's ear was defective, it hardly mattered. The pink-shaded candles hanging on the piano threw a warm light over her young figure, but left the pretty dreamy face in shadow. It would not be long now before Archie Flowerdew put the

question which had risen from his heart to his lips and which was trembling there. He was only waiting for an opportunity to speak.

Colonel Smart glanced at her as he followed his hostess out of the room. Willy was his heir, but he must leave something to this charming niece of his, this good girl who was about to do exactly what was expected of her. At any rate, he would choose her a handsome wedding present, or—or should it be a cheque?

Mrs. Smart's feet fell lightly on the stair carpet as she went up to her room. Her heart was dancing with joy and triumph, for the unexpected had happened, and she could now see a way out of her difficulties. As to the morality of what she was about, she had not the time even if she had had the will to consider it. She was doing her best for the children, and if the ways in which she set her feet were devious, she was scarcely aware of it. What mattered was that she should dispose of her find to the best advantage, that she should make the most of the opportunity suddenly presented to her. How lucky it was that she had thought of forcing the innumerable stones, little and big, out of their settings, and that she had persevered until they were all free!

She lifted down the desk and unlocked it, raising the rounded lid and letting down the front. In the cavity thus discovered lay a little row of chip boxes, seven of them, and a few loose stones. The woman

hesitated for a moment, and then feeling intuitively that some of the gems, owing to their size and shape, might be recognisable, she put aside the big amethyst, the heart-shaped opal, the one pearl and a certain large diamond, which had previously adorned the centre of the tiara. These, until she could find a use for them, might lie in one of the velvet partitions of her insignificant jewel-case. Their presence there would not be likely to arouse suspicion, for it would never occur to the ordinary suburban mind that they were of value.

Carrying the desk carefully in two hands, that she might not disarrange the order of the seven boxes, Mrs. Smart went down to the dining-room. It was a blue evening in May, and the laburnums on each side of the two gates were hung with tassels of pale gold. Mrs. Smart had an almond tree in her garden, but its pink petals were all shed and it was now full of slender green shoots. It stood midway between the two gates, flanked on one side by a red hawthorn, on the other by a white; and beyond these the heavy purple lilac hung over in buxom clusters.

The Colonel, attracted by the earthy smell of spring, had gone to the window, and now stood listening to the song of a distant nightingale, a smile curving but not parting his lips. During the few minutes of Minty's absence he had gone on a long journey, and the stars above his head were no longer those of northern skies. He was a determined opti-

mist, but the years he had left behind had been very good.

"Why didn't you turn up the gas?" cried his sister-in-law, bustling in. It was long since she had stood staring out into the moonshine and starlight of a spring evening.

The soldier came forward quickly. "It's many years," he said, "since I last heard the nightingale," and as the spark of light leapt up in the chandelier, revealing the commonplace comfort of the room, the contrast seemed to draw a veil over the poetry of the night, to close a window between themselves and the air so fresh and sweet after the rain, to deepen into mere mirk and blackness the royal blue of the skies. Disillusioned, he put out his hand for the desk. Its brass bands, its highly polished wood, its little gilt lock, were, he thought, the embodiment of prose.

"I feel sure that mother thought these things were valuable," Minty said deprecatingly. It was evident to her that in his own mind he had prejudged the stones.

Colonel Smart picked up the first of the little row of boxes and turned it over on to the terra-cotta tablecloth. His first impression was that the heap of dark blue stones was certainly either glass or paste, but when he had examined one or two he changed his mind. "Why," he cried with a little gasp of surprise, "I believe these are sapphires, yes, really sapphires," and he picked up the second box,

the box which held the rubies, and treated it in like fashion. "Rubies, as I live," he said, his wonder growing, "and these others—but they are diamonds! Heavens, what a find!"

Mrs. Smart turned up the other burners of the gas. She was of course quite collected, but she looked pleased and elated. Colonel Smart, now more than interested, went on with his examination of the gems. "These diamonds are very fine," he said. "White too, by Jove! I can't spot a yellow one among them. But I must see them by daylight. And what are these? Cats'-eyes? No, star sapphires—good ones, too. What luck!" He paused for a moment and turned to look at her. "And you never knew," he said. She had been left a little fortune, and had mistaken gold for dross, precious stones for coloured glass. What a strange world it was!

"Then they are real?"

"Real? By the Lord Harry, I should just think they are!"

"I wonder," said Mrs. Smart, a quiver which it was beyond her to control, sounding in her voice. "I wonder where mother got them?"

"Who was your mother?" inquired the Colonel.

"She was the daughter of a Norfolk farmer and she married a lawyer."

"How did she come to be farming that little place at Ashwater?"

"That was after father's death. She wasn't the sort of woman to sit with her hands in her lap, and she liked looking after chickens and cows and so forth."

"I see. Then, of course, the stones may have belonged to your father, and she may or may not have been aware of their value." He paused, staring at the vari-coloured heaps upon the table. "Yet it is hardly the collection of a connoisseur."

"No?" said Minty innocently, but he did not enlighten her further.

"I suppose she never told you anything about them?"

"Never. Mother was a great one for keeping things to herself."

"Ah, so you didn't know of their existence?"

"Not before she gave them to me."

"It's very queer," said Colonel Smart, and stroked his shaven chin, "but after all, how she came by these stones hardly matters to us, the main thing is that they are here. You are a lucky woman, Minty; these bits of coloured crystal are worth a small fortune."

Mrs. Smart drew a deep breath. "Not really," she said.

"Several thousand pounds!"

The woman's heart throbbed wildly for a few seconds.

"Several thousand pounds," she murmured in awe and wonder. "To think of it—several thou-

sand pounds!" No wonder the burglar had come back.

Colonel Smart drew one of the green leather chairs up to the table, and with the aid of a pocket lens settled down to a more systematic examination of the stones. It was evident that the mere sight of them had given him pleasure, that he was glad they belonged to and would enrich a member of the family. Minty, seated opposite to him, watched him for some time in silence. The ferment of excitement into which she had been thrown was being slowly clarified by other considerations.

"The stones may, as you say, be valuable," she remarked at last, "but I feel rather helpless. I suppose they ought to be sold?"

"Of course."

"I thought so; but—well, I should not know how to set about it."

"But I do." The Colonel glanced up from an emerald he was examining, a good-sized stone which had delighted him, in that it was flawless. "I've two appointments in Monday to shew the stones I bought in Ceylon and Burmah and Australia and Brazil and Columbia. If we can come to terms, I may sell them the greater part of what I've brought home."

"Yes?"

"And I could dispose of yours at the same time."

"Could you?"

"Why certainly."

Mrs. Smart meant to close with the offer, was indeed only too thankful to have received it, and yet she hesitated. "But—you see, I don't know anything about these stones."

"No-o, no you don't," he said, and pushed the heap of diamonds about with a meditative forefinger. "Still I can't see that that would matter. These, with the exception of the diamonds, are probably Eastern stones, the rubies coming from Burmah and the various sapphires from Ceylon. I am just home from those parts, and what more natural than for me to be doing business for a friend as well as for myself? As to the diamonds," he paused, and picking up a peculiarly bright specimen, held it between his eye and the light. "These are probably South African stones, though they may of course, be Brazilian."

"But I thought Cape diamonds were generally of a bad colour?" It was all she knew about diamonds and that only because an acquaintance, shewing her a little brooch, had emphasised the fact that the stones in it were from Brazil.

The Colonel pulled at his small grey moustache. "You get as good stones from the one place as from the other," he said, "but off-colour stones are generally known—it's a trade name—as Cape diamonds. It does not necessarily mean that they come from South Africa."

"I see."

"Anyway, as far as these are concerned, it doesn't

matter where they were found. I'm not supposed to know the history of my friend's stones."

"No," said Mrs. Smart thoughtfully, "no, of course not." She wondered whether there would be any danger in thus disposing of her find, whether any of the stones were chipped or worn or, as she put it to herself, "scratched." She did not know that it takes a diamond to cut a diamond, that the tools which she had used were impotent to mark the stones. "At any rate," thought she, "William is just the man to sell them for me." And she was right in thinking that no one, not even a diamond merchant, could doubt his bona fides. The soldier was so evidently what his appearance proclaimed him, a shrewd, honest, straightforward man of business. He was so palpably innocent of all evil intent that even if the stones should prove to be damaged in any way, no suspicion could be cast on him. "Well," said Mrs. Smart at length, "though I hardly like bothering you, I should of course be glad if you could dispose of them for me. They are of no use as they are, no use at all."

"You wouldn't like to keep one or two of them, enough for a brooch or a ring or something for Eva?"

But his sister-in-law shook her head. "Such stones would look out of place on either Eva or myself, besides," and this was the more cogent reason, "everybody would think they were paste."

The Colonel laughed at her, much as Willy would

have. "And paste is not respectable, eh?" The lace of her curtains and of her daughter's blouses was machine made, the forks she used were electro, the silk of her best underskirt was mercerised cotton, but these things did not matter, it was only paste that was not respectable. "Well, well, there's no knowing where people will draw the line."

Mrs. Smart was thinking her own thoughts. "The money will be very useful," she said slowly, "Willy wants me to start him in business, and it is evident that Eva's husband is likely to be a poor man."

"An intelligent young fellow!"

"Oh yes, and likely to get on, but it may be something of a struggle at first. I shall be glad," —a motherly smile broke up the heavy lines of her face—"I shall be glad to be of use to them."

The Colonel forgot the criticism he had only so lately passed. "Yes, yes, of course," he cried, his heart warming to the emotion she had expressed. "You are a good woman, Minty, and I'll sell these crystals for you as soon as I can, and for the utmost they will fetch."

CHAPTER X

In front of The Laurels a tiny gravelled drive ran in an accurate curve from gate to gate, and on each side of the three immaculate white front-door steps were beds now blue with forget-me-nots and the deeper colour of stiff grey-green iris clumps. To Colonel Smart, the little English garden with its centre bed of yellow wallflowers and yellower doronicum, its deep-blue flags, its pale forget-me-nots, and its smooth-shaven borders of grass was a never-ending delight. The perfection of the fresh green, the trimmed edges, the clipped shrubs, all emphasised for him the fact that after many years in the fierce and flaming East he was at home in dewy, tree-shaded England, at home again.

It was Monday morning, a "blithe and bonny" morning, and he and Mrs. Smart had gone with Willy as far as the gate. The early sunshine fell pleasantly on their uncovered heads, and a westerly wind sweeping over the tall grasses in the gin-distillers' fields was bringing them the scents of May. But in spite of its soft breath and the sight of the ox-eyed daisies and big red sorrel-heads, the Colonel was frowning. For one thing the light was in his eyes, and for another, Willy, as he turned away, had waved a hand instead of raising his hat to Mrs. Smart. The Colonel could not remember

ever to have stood with his hat on in his mother's presence; but then his attitude towards her had always been formal and more that of a courtier than a son. Still his nephew "was very slack, oh very slack indeed."

"Surely Willy's birthday comes this month?" he said, standing back for his sister-in-law to pass.

"Yes, on the 20th. He will be twenty-four."

"Ah, and it's some time since I remembered him in anything but my will. What shall I give him, Minty? How about an order on my tailor? Young fellows like to be smart."

Mrs. Smart stooped to uproot a couple of almost invisible weeds, groundsel and dandelion. "On your tailor, William?" she asked, lightly accentuating the pronoun.

"Well, I thought so." He fancied he was being diplomatic, but she had read his thoughts, and she answered him out of the wisdom which the years had brought.

"But the men here do not go to military tailors."

"No, indeed," said the Colonel.

"I expect," pursued Mrs. Smart, "that there are other little things——"

"Oh—er—well, his tie isn't exactly—and his hair—I wonder now where he gets his hair cut?"

"Yes, his tie and his hair and—and perhaps his ways?"

"Oh—er—nothing to matter, a word or two from me—but," with sudden choler, "he might at

least hold the door open for his mother and let her pass out first."

Minty smiled at him. She both understood and remembered. "When Richard died," she said, able at last after eight years to speak of that calamitous event with calmness; "when Richard died his mother saw the children. She did not say anything, but it was evident that she thought they were my children, that she did not mean to interfere in any way."

The great lady's indifference had rankled, but Minty had learnt from it and was now applying her knowledge. "She left them to me, and I have brought them up to be like everybody else—everybody that we know. Richard always felt out of it. He didn't say so. He was the sort of chimney that consumes its own smoke; but that was how he felt, and I don't want Willy——" Her eyes, grateful and affectionate, dwelt on him, taking the tiny sting out of her refusal. "No William, you must not give him an order on your tailor."

"Very practical," thought Colonel Smart, but something in him, hereditary and not to be ousted by reason, rebelled against her decision. "What made you put the boy into a stockbroker's office?" he asked discontentedly.

"He couldn't make up his mind what he wanted to do, and—well, there was the opening." Openings did not come every day, and beggars might not be choosers.

"But Smarts cannot lead an indoor life."

There it was again, the aristocratic standpoint. Colonel Smart could not understand that it did not matter what you were or what you did, so long as you could make a living by it. "Richard could," she said dubiously, "and he is Richard's son."

"And not in the least like him."

Mrs. Smart, who had taken up her knitting, finished a line before she spoke again, and the faint clash of the needles gave the Colonel a feeling of wholesome comfort and domesticity. "No, he isn't like Richard," she said at last. The child who had resembled him, the only one out of the three, was lying with her husband in the graveyard on the hill. The little Jocelyn had had Richard's sea-blue eyes, had been his father over again, even to his delicacy. Her one clever child, and she had lost him! His little tender body, the body born of her, cherished by her, loved and fondled, was a handful of dust, and she sat here working for those who remained. Oh, alas, alas, that she could do nothing, nothing at all, nothing any more for the child who was dead! The shadow of an old sorrow passed into her face and she fell silent, until the booming of a church clock startled both her and her companion.

"Here, I shall lose my train," cried Colonel Smart, who, like all leisured Englishmen, was inclined, having no real business, to make one of preliminaries, "where are those boxes of yours?"

Mrs. Smart hurried off to fetch them, and the

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thrill of an exciting present pushed the old memories aside. She felt that this business upon which she was engaged was very probably one of risk. But 'nothing venture, nothing have,' and if she and hers were to benefit from the treasure trove, it must be sold. Colonel Smart had accepted her story and was unsuspiciously ready to try and dispose of the stones. He, though learned in gems, had seen nothing strange about hers; why then should she, meeting trouble half-way, imagine that others might?

"I'll only take three of those boxes," he said when she reappeared with the desk; "put all the sapphires into one, the diamonds into the next, and the rubies, emeralds and opals into the third," and his quick hands hovered over the little boxes, pouring the stones from some into the others, hastily selecting and arranging. "There, that will do," and he stowed them away in pockets specially protected from thievish fingers, pockets of his own design, and yet made by that high and mighty tailor in Piccadilly.

Before the thin leaves of the deronicums had begun to wilt under the ardour of the sun, he was slowly climbing a by no means immaculate stone staircase in search of Messrs. Rubenstein and Rubenstein. Their office was on the third floor, and he found them facing one another across a narrow table, two little men, no darker than himself, but with high, thin foreign voices, men so much alike that they might have been twins. The friend in

Australia who had given him an introduction to them had vouched for their honesty, but had admitted that they were sharp business men. "They like money," he had said, "and they aren't giving any away."

The Colonel, seating himself at one end of the table, began to explain his business. "Mine are picked stones," he said, "and I've bought them from all sorts of people, in all sorts of places."

"Yes?" said the brothers. They were naturally vivid and eager personalities, but they sat like stone Buddhas and with much the same look of quiet, smiling expectancy.

"But before I show them to you," continued Colonel Smart, "I would like you to look at some parcels of gems, with the selling of which a friend has entrusted me. They are carefully matched stones and must, I fancy, have taken a long time to collect." He drew a chip box out of one of those hidden pockets, and opening it, tumbled out upon a tray before him, a variegated heap of sapphires. "There are twenty-eight matched stones of each kind," he said, "enough to make four rivieres," and he pushed the tray forward until it rested midway between the brothers.

In the little office a ray of the May sunshine had found its way through the dusty window. Falling on the stones, it glorified them into all the colours of the sea, but Theodore Rubenstein signed impatiently to his brother, and the pull of a blind cord

shut out the fairy brightness. Then, changing with a swiftness that was almost sudden, from inscrutable Eastern gods into sharp men of business, the brothers fell to work. The stones, blue green and white, were sorted into separate heaps, delicate instruments were brought out, and the experts began to test, to weigh, to consider.

"A suspicion of cloud," said Theodore, who, though he did not look it, was the elder, and he passed a stone across the table.

"Almost a streak," said Max shortly, as he returned it. His head, the top of which was level from front to back, with sloping sides, reminding Colonel Smart of the roof of a Gothic nave, had grown through the hair thereof, and the shining baldness of it gave him an undeserved look of middle age.

But for the most part the men said very little, applying themselves to their work in an eager silence. It was evident that the understanding between them was perfect, and that a glance sufficed to show the one what the other thought.

"These stones," said Max at length, "have perhaps been used—set?"

"I really know nothing about them," returned the Colonel with convincing candour. "I was not told their history, I was merely commissioned to sell them."

"Ah yes," said Theodore Rubenstein thoughtfully, as he swept the sapphires into a little heap

and pushed them towards his client; "and have you only sapphires?"

Colonel Smart brought out the diamonds, mentioned the number which the little receptacle contained, and handed it over to the brothers. He then counted the sapphires back into their box and returned it to his pocket. "I have also some rubies, a few opals, and one or two emeralds."

"Are all these diamonds square cut?" asked Theodore Rubenstein casually, as he separated the stones from one another with a thick, square-tipped finger, and proceeded to answer his own question. "No, I see the smaller are round, but all brilliants, ye-es all, not a rose among them." And again the brothers fell to work with their delicate instruments, among which not the least delicate were their own hard, bright eyes and cunning hands. Presently Max pushed a stone aside. "Off colour," he said.

"Ah, I missed that," murmured the Colonel.

The other looked up. "Oh, they have been carefully chosen. Your friend knew what he was about."

"Glad you like them."

Theodore Rubenstein flicked out his fingers with a little foreign gesture. "We like them, oh yes, but stones of this kind are not much in our line. We make a speciality of procuring unusual gems, like those of which you spoke; we do not do much in parcels of diamonds." He pushed the stones to-

gether and passed them back to Colonel Smart. "But if you would let us see yours?"

The Colonel felt vaguely disappointed. He had thought it would be perfectly easy to dispose of Minty's hoard, and yet the first firm to whom he had taken it was making difficulties. But he did not lose faith. They might reconsider their decision, or even if they did not, he could take it to someone else. He drew out a pair of cat's-eyes and a large black opal and set them down before the brothers.

"Any more?" said Theodore.

Almost reluctantly their owner produced a big flawless ruby, a small blue diamond and two gem amethysts of perfect colour.

"Any more?" said Theodore.

"Not with me. I thought I'd see what I could do with these."

The Rubensteins examined them carefully and interchanged a quick glance of pleasure. They did not find it necessary to depreciate stones which they intended to buy, for after all, if the seller were not amiably inclined, they could always refuse to do business with him; and their credit was so good, their standing so high, that he was more likely to regret it than they.

"We shall be delighted to make you an offer for these," they said. "We must beg you to excuse us while we discuss it."

The Colonel looked after them as they went out of the room, and then, almost as if ashamed of the

action, he drew the seven stones towards him, and with lingering fingers ranged them in a line—the blue diamond, the ruby, the cat's-eyes, the amethysts, and last, because he liked it best, the strange black opal. He must sell these stones of his, must see them pass into alien hands, but it went against the grain. He remembered, as part of his life's history, where he had found each one of them, how he had waited and bargained, and sunk into each a little more of his capital. Like pictures, he saw the places and the persons, the whole scenes of their acquisition. He thought of his secret joy in them, of how he had carried them about with him, fed his eyes upon them, and learnt from their perfection to judge more accurately of other stones. And now he must let them go.

The Rubensteins had little difficulty in determining what they should offer the Colonel for his rare and precious gems. "And the first lot?" said Max. He did not want to be mixed up in anything shady, but it seemed a pity, unless it were necessary, to let those sapphires go.

"Wouldn't touch 'em," said his more cautious elder. "Nice stones of course, but—well—where's their settings?"

"The old chap's honest enough."

"Too honest," commented Theodore.

The brothers returned to find Colonel Smart still staring regretfully at his treasures. There had been a time when they, too, had cared for precious

the usual rubbish. He had no doubts, and after some consideration offered to take the lot. He would give a good price, as much as the Colonel could expect; and his surprise when the seller proved to have his own opinions on that subject, was unconcealed.

"Five thousand, or I take them elsewhere!"

But five thousand! What a sum! No, no, really he could not think of it. The stones were not worth it. The diamonds were fine, and, oh yes, of the first water, and some of them were a fair size; and the emeralds—ah, flawless were they? But the rubies were very small, and as to the opals, you could scarcely call them pin-fire. So he argued, trying to depreciate the gems, seeking a good bargain; but in the end, as the stones were really cheap at five thousand pounds, the Colonel had his way.

To Minty's astonished delight, therefore, that sum of money was presently lodged to her credit in the National Provincial Bank. Mr. Carvalho made a pretty profit on the transaction, Colonel Smart rubbed his hands together and congratulated himself on a good day's work, and the stones in small parcels were, as opportunity offered, sold back to the trade. The treasure trove had been safely commuted into money; and the money was Minty's, to be used for the promotion of her children's happiness and to bring them success in life. And would it?

PART II

CHAPTER XI

Some time later that year Mrs. Smart, looking back, saw the past summer as one unusually full of events. She had not expected anything from the passing months, and lo, they had brought her Eva's engagement and her son's start in life.

After the termination of Colonel Smart's momentous visit, Willy had been unexpectedly released from uncongenial toil for the space of a fortnight. He had made use of his liberty to wheel his bicycle out of the front gate, mount and ride away, no one, not even himself, knowing whither. Mrs. Smart and Eva had watched him start, and the latter had then gone up to do some packing. She had promised to stay with an old schoolfellow who was now living at Surbiton.

"But I don't like leaving you, Mother," she said affectionately, when Mrs. Smart came in to help her fold some skirts. "You will be all alone."

"Well, I don't know," returned Mrs. Smart. "For one reason and another I've never yet found time to go through your Granny's things. I might take the opportunity of your both being away to run over to Ashwater for a day or two."

"Why yes," said Eva, "so you might."

"Tamsin would be glad to have me, but——"

She did not finish the sentence. It would be her first visit to the farm since her mother's death, and how could she bear the emptiness of the rooms?

"You will have to go some day," said her sympathetic but sensible daughter.

"And if a thing has to be done as well get it over. Well, yes, dearie, I suppose so."

"What has Tamsin done with Granny's things?"

"Put them all into her room and turned the key. I have to decide what is to become of them."

"I suppose there must be rather an accumulation. Don't get rid of anything that is quaint and old."

Mrs. Smart smiled indulgently. Eva had been bitten with the craze of the day and her mother would humour her. Why not, indeed? What were mothers for if not to gratify the whims and fancies of their children, those whims and fancies at which the world scoffs. "I'll bring you back all the old rubbish I can lay my hands on."

"And I shall know that it is really old," said the girl with satisfaction. "What people buy is so often only a copy. But if you go, Mother, how will you arrange about Annie and the house?"

"Give her a holiday and shut it up. The police can be trusted to keep an eye upon it."

"Can be trusted now," said Eva, and proceeded to lay a cool-looking green linen frock on the top of some others.

"I wonder if you will go on the river at all?" said Mrs. Smart, eyeing it thoughtfully. She felt

that the linen frock would look well with a background of bright cushions in a long river boat.

"Oh—er—yes, I think so," answered Eva, her face grown suddenly hot with colour. "I mean, it's likely, Mattie's husband being a rowing man."

But the blush had told Mrs. Smart all that she wanted to know. She turned away with a little sigh, for where is the mother who thinks her daughter's chosen worthy of the little white soul and body that she has cherished, watched over, kept clean and pure through the years of childish and girlish development? And yet Eva must marry. "But why this man?" asked Mrs. Smart of herself, not knowing that her mother and her mother's mother before her, had breathed the same question.

As soon as arrangements could be made, and they merely necessitated a postcard to Tamsin, a conversation with Annie Price and some locking of cupboards, The Laurels was handed over to the care of the local police, and Mrs. Smart and Eva, their luggage having preceded them in the outside porter's cart, toiled up the hot and shadeless High Street on their way to the station.

Mrs. Smart saw her daughter off and then bought herself a ticket for Ashwater. Never before had she so unwillingly set her face in that direction; and it was not altogether the emptiness of the rooms which made her reluctant. That would merely reawaken grief, set old memories a-throb, fill her with a melancholy not wholly lacking in sweetness and resigna-

tion. What she feared was lest the accustomed places might seem too full—too full of Tamsin Tinney, the erstwhile servant. How could she endure to see this stranger in her mother's chair, to hear her giving orders, she who had hitherto spent her days in receiving and obeying them. Mrs. Smart felt that the position must be difficult, might be impossible, and her courage failed her a little at the thought of passing three days under the roof she still thought of as home, of being for three days Tamsin's guest.

But it is the unexpected that happens and when she alighted at Ashwater, it was to find that Tamsin had come in to meet her. The day was dry and hot, one of those heavy days when every passing vehicle raises a pale brown smoke of dust, of a dust which hangs in the air, and only very slowly sinks through it on to blade and leaf. Tamsin was in a black dress which had been lavishly banded and flounced with crape, but its effect was spoilt by the sprinkling of powdered road which had settled on her during her walk from the farm to the station.

"Ah do be glad to see 'ee," she said heartily, her small work-worn hand clutching Mrs. Smart's, her old-apple face creased into welcoming smiles, and the other saw at once that this was no 'Jack in office,' but a woman who through long months had been suffering from that emptiness of the rooms which Minty knew of and dreaded. "'Ee won't go back 'fore you'm obliged to, will 'ee?"

"I'm afraid I cannot stay more than a day or two," Mrs. Smart said, as they made their way out of the station, the two women carrying between them the tiny rush case which held the visitor's belongings. In Eastham Mrs. Smart could not have helped to carry her luggage, but here it was different. By stepping out of the train at Ashwater, she had slipped back to the class in which people were not ashamed to be seen doing their own work.

"Not more'n a day or two?" echoed Tamsin disappointedly. "Why, the sortin' 'ull take 'ee all that and more. 'Ee'll have no time, 'ardly, to goo round and see what Ah bin doin'. Every time as Ah did this and that, Ah thought Ah'll shew it Miss Minty when her comes." She looked up wistfully at the taller woman. "Ah felt somehow as Ah did belong to shew it to 'ee, seein' as Ah couldn't no longer to the mistress."

"But of course I must see everything," said Minty kindly. Tamsin's plea was one that she did not wish to deny, moreover she had always been interested in the cackling, quacking, grunting, lowing creatures of the farm.

The little Cornishwoman brightened. "An 'ee'll tell me if Ah'm doin' it all as the mistress would have wished," she said humbly. It was evident that to her mind Minty stood in her mother's shoes, so evident that the other's troubled fears began to fade. Tamsin was the kind old creature she had always been; she claimed no rights, made herself of no

importance, and therefore could be given what she did not seem aware that she possessed.

"I hope everything is doing well. Last year the rats killed some of the young goslings, didn't they?"

"'Iss, and Ah killed they; this year we've got a terr'ble fine lot." And she began to explain as she would have done to her late mistress the state of affairs in the various departments of the farm. "'Tis most tea-time," she wound up at last, as they turned in at the gate, "and Ah'll be glad to get out of my blacks, 'ee too likely? Put on something as 'ee can go traipsin' about 'farm in and us'll go out after."

Mrs. Smart, careful woman, had brought with her one of the print overalls which she was wont to put on when she had cooking or other household work to do; and Tamsin, who had returned to the rusty clothes of everyday wear, looked at her with approval when she eventually came down into the big raftered kitchen. There everything was as it had been in her mother's time, except that the sewing machine which had stood to the right of the open hearth as long as she could remember was no longer there, and the old red tea-service of Russian china had been replaced by white cups and saucers with a pink edge.

"'Ee'll pour out, won't 'ee, Miss Minty?" said Tamsin wistfully. She would like, now that the wound of her loss was healing, to see the daughter in her mother's place, to feel that she was no longer

alone, that her labours, hopes, efforts, mattered to somebody.

"Ah no, Tamsin, I couldn't," said Minty hurriedly. "I've never sat there, you know. I—I couldn't."

Tamsin looked at the wooden elbow chair. "Nor Ah can't nayther," she said with a sorrowful shake of the head. "Ah've set theer since," and she indicated the side of the table.

"Yes," said Minty, her voice full of sympathy and understanding, "and why shouldn't you go on doing so?" Her heart had warmed towards Tamsin, this respectful and affectionate Tamsin.

"If 'ee doan't mind, Ah will," said the other, and with the assistance of her little servant, the tea-tray which had been placed at the end of the table, was shifted, regardless of bread platter, butter dish and saucer of radishes, to the side where Tamsin sat.

Minty took her old place to the right of the chair, and for a moment, as Tamsin said grace, the strangeness and sadness of this return overcame her. To one side was that empty chair; and above, in the room over their heads, all her mother's personal belongings lay waiting for her to pronounce upon them, all the things which she had used so carefully and would never use again. For the moment she felt as if she and Tamsin were waiting for that mother to come in, as if they would presently hear her step on the brick floor, and her kindly: "Why, Minty, my dear child, I didn't know you

were come." The tears rose from her heart to her eyes, and she took the bread which Tamsin offered in a silence which the other understood. The time had been when she had known what it was to be jealous of her mistress' only child, but that was long ago, or seemed so to the old servant; and though jealous of her, she had always liked Miss Minty. Now she more than liked her, sharing with her as she did a few precious memories and a common grief. Once more she plunged into talk, but this time it was to divert her guest's attention rather than to arouse her interest.

The farm table had in Mrs. Lovell's day been plentifully but plainly furnished forth, and Tamsin had not made any change. The little servant, Susan Field, sat at the far end of the big deal table and took her meals with her mistress, and it was all homely and peaceful. The declining sun sent long rays through the lattice windows of the raftered room, and a cat, Tamsin's one innovation, sat blinking sleepily at the oil stove which, it being summer, had taken the place of a fire.

"Now if you'm rested Ah'll take 'ee round the farm," Tamsin said, rising briskly from her chair and signing to Susan to clear away.

Minty went with her hostess into the vegetable garden, noting idly that two fresh hives had been added to the row by the herb-bed, and Tamsin saw the glance. "Mr. Brent have sown red clover in the five-acre lot and that do make a wonderful dif-

ference to the honey." She went towards a large tin tub which had been fitted with a front wheel, hind legs and shafts. Lifting the last named, she began to trundle it away towards the pigsties, and Mrs. Smart followed. "'Ee knaw that big red house up to station?" said Tamsin, a little breathlessly, as she paused by the wooden palings, and with an old hand-bowl began to fill the long, sharp-angled troughs, the pigs squealing, grunting and falling over one another in their eagerness to get at the food. "They do let me have all this stuff, for the trouble of fetchin' it. Look here," she ladled out half a loaf and some sodden meat. "Their cook wasties no end, but it edn't my business, and the pigs they'm fattenin' a sight."

"You must wish there were more red houses about," said Mrs. Smart idly. She was thinking that the sties were as well kept as in her mother's time.

"Another've gone up since you been here, and Ah," she fixed her little twinkling eyes on the shrewd face of the other woman. "Ah've had some talk wi' their cook."

Mrs. Smart was interested. "Yes?"

"Ah rackon it do be going to cost me five shillin'."

"Ah!"

"But five shillin' 'edn't much, for all as they wasties in a big house. Ah'm going to buy a two-three more li'l' pigs, Ah do think, come Michaelmas.

There's that strip of wood, as your mother bought the summer afore her died, 'tes full of oak trees, and they pigs belong to get a heap of acorn from't, not to speak of all this kitchen stuff."

The tin tub being now empty, Tamsin started back with it; and as they went, she drew her companion's attention to the various animals, to the hens, eight to every hundred-foot run, the big white Aylesbury ducks, the geese, and the pigeons. The hay from the big meadow had just been carted home, a fine stack of fodder, and Tamsin was making arrangements for some twenty of the chicken runs to be carried over to the shorn field.

"They do fat the land, they hins," she said wisely. "But you don't want to put too many on't. 'T' longer Ah live, 't more sure Ah be, that hins is just one of the rotation o' crops, but farmers won't see 'em so."

The lowing of kine brought the promenade to an end, and the two women, each with pail and milking stool, for Mrs. Smart had insisted upon helping, went towards the byre. It was evident that Tamsin was doing as well if not better than her predecessor. A provision shop in the Edgeware Road, which had been wont to buy all that Mrs. Lovell could supply, had contracted with her for her produce, and once a week she rose in the small hours and drove her laden market cart to town, returning while it was yet morning. Dairy produce, vegetables, herbs, poultry, bacon, nothing came amiss to them, for

they were in a large way of business, and the excellence of what she brought made them willing customers.

"'Tes more convanient to sell they everything at 't lowest price than to be hawking the things about the plaäce, in t'hope of makin' a li'l more," Tamsin said as they sat at supper.

Mrs. Smart nodded. The board, with its simple plenishing, its horn-handled knives and homely delft, was reminding her of some old-fashioned rhymes which she had learnt in her childhood and long forgotten.

Close live
And nothing give,
You'll have gold
When you're old.

Ope the door
Feed the poor—
And you'll be cold
When you're old.

"And neist summer," continued Tamsin placidly, "Ah'll be startin' turkeys. They be delicate fowl, but Ah'll rear they or knaw the reason why."

Mrs. Smart answered out of her abstraction. "It must be very lonely here!" Somehow it had never seemed to her that her mother might be lonely, mothers being a race above such commonplaces of human feeling; but Tamsin, in her setting of big farm kitchen, seemed a very small, forlorn and aging creature.

"Ah dunno as Ah'm much of a one for coompany," the Cornishwoman said. "Your mother did say Ah was to have a day every month for to go and

see my friends, but Ah had'n none in these parts, so Ah bided to home."

"But haven't you any relations, anybody who would like to come and live here with you?"

"My father do keep a public up to Port Isaac," answered the other slowly. "He and mother is still braäve and well, but gettin' along in years. My sister that lives wi'm told me in a letter that Ah did ought to come home and see they all. You see they'm married mostly, they wouldn't want to come here."

"And you couldn't leave the farm?"

The other gave her a keen glance. "Not this year Ah couldn't, Ah knaw that."

"Someday, then, you think of going?"

"'Tes like this. Ah bin away twanty year er more." She paused, thoughts which she was powerless to put into words, filling her mind. "Oh, sure 'nuff, Ah'd like to go."

"But how will you manage?"

Tamsin hemmed and hawed, hesitating to speak, but finally Mrs. Smart learnt that the little woman was buoyed up by a hope that concerned herself. With what she felt to be great daring, she asked if she might not some time during the following summer leave the farm in Mrs. Smart's care and take a holiday; and she suggested humbly that Master Willy might like the fishing and Miss Eva be willing to come over "for a bit of change like."

The truth was that Tamsin, now comparatively

rich, mistress of a little farm and with a goodly sum —the savings of those twenty years—to her credit in the bank, wanted to return in triumph to those who had known her as a servant. She would be great among her own people, a prophet in her own country and in her father's house; where she had been poor, would flaunt herself and her possessions; it would be the apotheosis of a starveling life.

"If 'ee won't," she said wistfully, "Ah mustn' look to go, but Ah'd like it fine. And after all, the bit of land's your own. Ah thought maybe 'ee'd like to have it to yourself for a week or two; 'sides, 'tisn't this summer, 'ee knaw, but neist, when things is more settled like."

And Minty Smart found herself looking favourably on the suggestion. To have the old home to herself for a fortnight! To be there with her children, with the memories of her mother and of her dear companionable father! She realised abruptly that she would like to fall in with Tamsin's plans. As to the work, who better fitted to undertake it than herself—she who had been brought up on the farm, and to whom the lore of it, bred in her bones, seemed to have come by nature?

"I could do it," she said cautiously, "and I shouldn't mind doing it, but a year's a long time, and many things may happen before August twelvemonth."

The half promise was, however, more than the Cornishwoman had expected. A flame of gratitude

lighted up her poor anxious heart and shone out in words. "Do 'ee knaw there's 'scursions," she said eagerly, and it was evident that during the long months since Mrs. Lovell's death she had thought out and matured her plans, "and Ah could go and come by one o' they? A fortnight they gives you, and the ticket costes under twanty shillun. And if you was to come, Ah couldn't tell 'ee how thankful Ah'd be. 'Twould be the first real holiday as Ah've had since Ah was a maiden at the school."

"Then we must see if it can't be managed," Mrs. Smart said kindly. She was not given to making rash promises, but she really thought that she and the children might transfer themselves to the farm for a fortnight during the ensuing summer. She could look after the farm and sort out what was to go to that shop in Edgeware Road. If Eva did not object, she could even drive it there herself.

It was not until after breakfast on the following morning that she was free to attend to the business which had brought her to Ashwater. When she stood inside her mother's bedchamber, surrounded by the dead woman's possessions, she felt for the moment strangely young and inexperienced. It was as if she, still a child, were meddling with articles forbidden to childish fingers, as if she had no right in this room, and might at any moment be turned out in disgrace.

On the dismantled bed, light boxes of cardboard, brown and white, had been piled, and on the floor

were other heavier cases. The sewing machine stood by a work-table with a green silk well, the ugly competent present elbowing the dainty but futile past, and beyond these was something that she could not remember to have seen before, something that must have been hidden among the lumber of an attic —an old wooden cradle on rockers, with a carven head and cane sides. Mrs. Smart went over to it. She supposed that she had lain in it, and she felt that whatever else was sold or given away, this must be preserved; this must be for—for Eva's children. Already the thought of them was in her mind, these children who were to be the crown of her old age, the reward of her patient, temperate, laborious life.

The sight of the cradle had given her back the feeling of responsibility with which she had undertaken her task. She no longer felt like a little girl trespassing on forbidden ground, but as a woman who before many years had been counted might behold her grandchildren. With renewed courage she set to work upon the accumulations round and about her. Eva had begged her to retain anything that was quaint and old, and Mrs. Smart, with her eye upon that nest to be, put aside all sorts of trifles which might be useful. Old-fashioned chintzes and furniture and knick-knacks were the mode, though why, Mrs. Smart could not imagine, unless it were that seasoned wood was of better value. But that did not account for the useless odds and ends which

people feigned to admire, and for which they were willing to pay extravagant sums. "Lumbering up their houses with a lot of old rubbish and putting cracked and chipped china in the drawing-room," said Mrs. Smart. "Give me something new and fresh and pretty."

But Eva followed the fashion, and for her sake many of Mrs. Lovell's belongings, which would otherwise have been ruthlessly condemned to the second-hand shop, were kept. Mrs. Smart packed them carefully. It would cost a good deal to send them by goods train or carrier to Eastham. On the whole, the cheapest plan would be to hire one of Mr. Brent's farm carts and send them jogging slowly along through the country lanes to meet her on her return.

As Tamsin had prophesied, the work of sorting and packing took her some days. There were papers to be gone through and destroyed, a few daguerrotypes of stiff-looking men and women, in fact, all the débris of a lifetime. Minty, ignorant of her mother's past, consigned to the rubbish-heap a photograph that Mrs. Lovell had cherished a little guiltily during the thirty odd years which had elapsed since her husband's death, the photograph of the man she had not married. But to Minty it was an unknown, unrecognisable face—so far apart can women and their children be.

She was on the look-out, however, for anything that had belonged to her father, things that he had

used, his mother-o'-pearl sleeve-links, a pair of foils, some books. At the bottom of a long box she found some tarnished epaulettes and a couple of swords, and suddenly an old memory awoke. Her father's father had been a soldier. She had forgotten it, but the sight of the swords brought back her mother's words, "He died while still a young man—perhaps it was as well." The soldier had not lived to see his only child a felon, toiling under ward among other felons, and "perhaps it was as well."

Mrs. Smart laid the swords aside. They should be hung upon the marbled wall of the entrance passage at home, and in the course of time they should be Willy's, a legacy to him from his great-grandfather, from the man with the clean record. But the epaulettes she threw away. She would not hoard "a lot of old rubbish."

On the whole, in spite of her forebodings, Mrs. Smart's few days at the farm passed happily enough. Steeped in a tender melancholy that seemed to emanate from the things she was daily handling, she found that her memories had lost their poignancy, that her grief had changed into loving recollection. She felt, too, as if being at the farm had brought her nearer to her mother. When she woke in the morning it seemed to be in answer to that mother's call; and when she lay down at night, it was almost in the hope that presently a step would halt at her door and the familiar face look in to bid her good-

night. Moreover, Minty Smart naturally preferred farm to villa life; and the change from the proprieties of Eastham, to the work, 'early to rise and early to bed,' of Ashwater, was refreshing.

She had arranged to return to The Laurels a day or two before Eva was expected home, but to her surprise she found the girl awaiting her. "You didn't stay as long as you thought you would," she said.

"No-o, come and have your tea, mother. I'll tell you about it presently."

Mrs. Smart gave up her hat and gloves and parasol, and preceded her daughter into the dining-room. "I've a cartload of things coming over," she said pleasantly, "and they may be here at any moment. You will like what I've put aside for you."

But the carter was taking his time, and when the tea was cleared away there was still no sign of him.

"Let us go round the garden, Mother," suggested the girl. "Everything will have grown enormously."

"Why yes," said Mrs. Smart briskly. "The strawberries ought to be ripe by now; that is, if the birds have left us any." She was a pleasant mother, with smooth, cool cheeks and a most cushiony figure, just the kind to lean against when tired, or to kiss when very happy. Eva was the latter, and as they strolled down the long path and round by the fruit trees, she slipped an arm about Mrs. Smart's ample waist and snuggled up to her.

"Mother," she said softly, "Mr. Flowerdew was at Surbiton yesterday."

Her mother reflected. "'Yesterday" had been a Wednesday. "A half holiday?" she said.

Eva nodded. "He took us up the river," she said, "the Browns and I."

"It was a lovely day," assisted Mrs. Smart.

"We had tea somewhere, and afterwards we went for a stroll, and"—the girl, blushing and confused, looked more than ever like a June rose—"and he asked me to marry him."

"Of course, dear."

"Oh Mother," she hid her blushing face on the elder woman's shoulder, "did you suspect?"

"Oh my dear," and Minty gathered the young figure to her, kissing the thick dark hair, "I'm not blind."

Eva pulled herself together. "But I was," she said with a little surprised laugh at past density. "I thought it was all friendship, just the most heavenly friendship that had ever been. I thought so until he told me, until he—he——" She paused in renewed confusion, and Mrs. Smart knew that even as the Sleeping Beauty had been awakened by a kiss, so with a kiss had Archie Flowerdew opened the eyes of her young daughter.

"I know," she said tenderly, "I have been young, and I loved your father."

Eva drew a deep breath and looked away across the brightness of the summer garden into the greater

brightness of the sunset. "Oh Mother, how wonderful it all is! Seven months ago and we had never met, and now he is so much to me that I want to spend all the rest of my life with him."

They strolled on in a contented silence, leaving the overgrown rhubarb plants, the gooseberry bushes and the potato patch behind, and emerging by the well-kept tennis-lawn. On the other side of the path were low-growing rose-trees alternating with clumps of sweet peas, those faintly tinted butterflies which are tethered to earth by a green thread, and which flutter in every breeze with the hope of freedom. At last Eva broke the silence. "You remember where we met?"

"At that second subscription dance."

"Yes, Bertie Chippendale brought him up to me, and our steps suited so well that we had—er—several dances together. I remember he teased me about Bertie until I was quite cross, and yet I felt all the time that he knew I didn't care about Bertie or anybody else." She drew a long breath of reminiscence. "It was the most delightful dance I'd ever been to!" she said dreamily.

"Yes, dearie," said her mother, full of sympathy and comprehension. "I know," as indeed she did.

"And then the skating, and the first time he came to the house. Oh Mother, what a happy, happy time it has been!"

"Yes, dearie."

"And now I am happier than ever. Looking back, I feel as if all the jolly times had been leading up to this; but I didn't know it then, I just took them as they came."

"In fact, it was love at first sight with you both."

"Yes," murmured the girl shyly.

"I felt that, or perhaps I should have interfered."

"Interfered?" There was a world of dismay in the soft exclamation.

"Unmarried women haven't either happiness or trouble, but married have both the one and the other," affirmed Mrs. Smart. "Mothers want their girls to marry perfect men and escape the trouble; but men aren't perfect, each of them has his different little ways, and the girls will marry, must, I suppose."

"But if the ways of one particular man suit one particular girl, the two ought to be happy."

"How can they suit if 'ways' is only another word for faults?"

Eva looked grave and more than a little unhappy. "Archie told me he was irritable."

Her mother nodded.

"But," anxiously, "I am good-tempered."

"Yes," said Mrs. Smart, "of course that will help, but he has other faults."

Young love found it difficult to believe. "Oh Mother, not really?"

"Yes, dearie, he is inclined to be selfish and self-indulgent, and because you love him you will want to spoil him. A woman's love mostly hinders a man. She's a cushion when she should be an encouragement."

"Mother, aren't you pleased about it; don't you like him?" She laid troubled emphasis upon the "like," for this was not altogether how she had expected Mrs. Smart to receive the news of her engagement.

"I am pleased to have you marry, very pleased; and I'm glad you're going to marry the man you fancy; and I shall like him according to how he treats you."

Eva pleaded. "Mother, you are too bad," she said.

"Time tryeth troth," quoted Mrs. Smart. "I found that written inside my mother's wedding ring. But anyway, Eva, I really believe Mr. Flowerdew is a nice young man with excellent qualities."

Eva brightened at once. "Tell me?" she coaxed.

"Well, dearie, I think he'll love you all the time, and of course he's very clever and good-looking and generous. Perhaps his faults are only on the surface, and perhaps, too, you may help him to mend them."

"I?" said humility. "Oh Mother!"

"If you aren't too much of a cushion." She sighed, thinking of the past. Her mother had been neither a cushion nor an encouragement to her hus-

band, but then she had not loved him. She had stood aside and let him go his own way. Would Eva's lot be a happier one? "Most people," said Mrs. Smart, "love and give, only very few know how to love and deny."

CHAPTER XII

Mr. Brent's carter being one of those who liked to take his ease at his inn, the farm-waggon with its heterogeneous load of boxes and furniture did not arrive until somewhat late that evening. As a consequence, Eva and her mother spent most of the following day unpacking, apportioning, finding places for their new possessions. The girl was frankly delighted with her share of the spoil.

"It would seem as if you had had a pre-vision of what was going to happen," she said joyfully, as she spread out an old and, it must be confessed, somewhat moth-eaten piece of brocade, "think of this now."

Mrs. Smart looked at it distastefully. In her own mind she labelled it rubbish. "It's rather moth-y," she said.

"Oh, I'll bake it; but, Mother, it's so dim-looking and rich, it will make a lovely piano back or I could throw it over the end of a sofa! And Granny's work-table," she pulled out the drawer of many compartments, "think of all the pretty silks and elegancies that once fitted with these divisions."

Mrs. Smart was examining the sewing machine. "How often I have seen mother with her foot on the treadle, as she guided some piece of stuff, which meant clothes for me, under the needle," she said.

"I never saw her use the work-table except to store cottons in, but this was a different matter." And her thoughts went back to old days at the farm when to her mother's outdoor work was added the shaping and making of simple garments. Her clothes had been very plain, so plain that her schoolfellows had remarked upon them. It had annoyed her at the time but now she was glad, oh, very glad that her frocks should have been so straight and have had so little trimming. "In the long run Eva," she said thoughtfully, "you will come to like the honest old sewing machine better than that pretty toy."

The boxes had been piled along the sides of a tiny apartment between the front bedchambers, an apartment which had once been Mr. Smart's dressing-room. But the heavier pieces of furniture, a writing-table, an armchair, the cradle, and a long cheval glass, incongruous remnants of a time, dim even to Minty and unknown to Minty's children, had been piled against and upon one another in the hall. "They can't stay here," said Mrs. Smart as she came downstairs.

"I'll have the long glass in my bedroom," said Eva eagerly.

"And of course, mother's armchair must go into mine, and we must find room for that writing-table in the drawing-room."

Eva studied the old-fashioned cradle. "And what will you do with this?"

"In the meantime," said Mrs. Smart, finishing a sentence which she had not uttered, "it can be left in the loft. Willy shall put it there when he comes back," and with a tired step, for the day had been long and she had worked hard, she walked forward into the dining-room.

Eva too had been busy, but the excitement of her engagement and new possessions, of those first straws for the nest, had set a dancing spirit in her feet and she went lightly up to the rounded window and looked out. Presently, when they had eaten their tea-supper and the pleasant dimpsey light was losing itself in the purples of evening, her lover would come in at the gate, she would hear its clash as it swung to behind him and she would run out to greet and bring him in. Since yesterday she had acquired a multitude of new sweet rights, and perhaps the sweetest was this simplifying of their relations. Hitherto others had ministered to him, had sought him, had claimed his attention; now, by this ring upon her finger, he was hers.

"What are Archie's plans for the future?" asked Mrs. Smart from her armchair, and the girl turned quickly about. Love's young dream takes little heed of income or the lack of it.

"That is the difficulty," she said with cheerfulness. "The poor boy has no prospects and he only gets a hundred and fifty a year; however, we can wait."

"But if he has no prospects——"

"If he had he would have spoken to me before."

"Then now——"

"Oh no, it was only that he could not wait any longer."

Mrs. Smart had married on a small income, and had been happy. She looked at Eva, Eva who was usually so practical, so full of commonsense. "But no prospects!" she said. Narrow means at the beginning would be good discipline, but narrow means for a lifetime!"

"Oh well," returned her daughter, "of course he hopes some day to have a school of his own."

"Then he did speak of the future?"

"He said he was on the look-out for a school."

"But if he has no private means?"

"Well, there's an idea that his brother-in-law might find the money. They are very good friends and if Archie discovered a suitable school he would get Mr. Johnson to invest money in it, to buy it in fact and then he would pay interest."

"He would begin his married life in debt?"

"Oh Mother dear, it's all a matter of business. Mr. Johnson invests in all sorts of things, so why not in this? I am sure it would pay him well."

"But what do you think of the idea?"

"I don't know anything about business, in fact I suggested starting here in a small way and building up a connection. The Johnsons would send their boys and perhaps the Murrows and the Chippen-

dales and that would be a beginning. There isn't a good school here."

"What did he say?"

"He wouldn't hear of it, and I daresay he is right. He must know more about the matter than I can."

"Well, I'm in favour of your beginning at the beginning. It's better to live small and have cash in your pocket than to spend all you make in paying off a debt."

"It sounds as if it were," said Eva. "But Archie says if you begin small you remain small; and he doesn't want to be a poor man all his life."

"Ah," said the mother, "but we can't fly over our mountains, we have to climb them. It may, as you say, be a matter of business, but I'm not satisfied. I wish he'd been content to begin small, I do indeed."

"Well, so do I, but in this matter the decision must rest with him," and Eva turned resolutely back to the window. She had faith in her lover's judgment, more faith than in her own commonsense; and yet she doubted, with the woman's immemorial doubt of masculine wisdom, and doubting was troubled.

The last red streaks of day were fading out of the sky and the soft June night stealing softly over east to west, was hanging stars like stalactites from the deep over-arching blueness. Eva stood looking, listening, dreaming, until the drowsy chirp of the

last bird was hushed, until an eager insistent push upon the gate, let through to her the man for whom she was waiting.

"Oh Mother," she cried as she ran by on her way to the door, "it is all right, it will be all right, it must be all right because," there was almost a sob in the soft thrilling voice, "I love him so."

"Yes," said Mrs. Smart to herself, "and that is why it may be all right—in time."

When on just such another evening Willy wheeled his bicycle into the garden and was presently apprised of these events, he expressed himself as moderately pleased. Upon further acquaintance Flowerdew had proved less supercilious and more interesting. He had realised that it might be as well to propitiate the younger man, and when he unbent he could be a charming companion. Willy had been fascinated by his traveller's tales. On leaving the 'Varsity Flowerdew had accepted the post of tutor to Lord Albert Gaveston, and they had wandered far afield. Their escapes had not been hair-breadth nor their adventures very strange, but Flowerdew knew how to make the best of his material and Willy, metaphorically, had sat at his feet. He announced himself as pleased at the engagement, but confided to his mother that Colonel Smart had thought "Archie liquored a bit freely."

"But I can't see it. Some men, and Flowerdew's one of them, can stand a lot. It isn't how much you drink, but what effect it has upon you."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Smart. She held vigorous opinions upon the subject and did not fear to express them. "It's a bad thing to get into the way of drinking spirits, whatever the effect it has. But," her ineradicable optimism coming into play, "young men often form habits of which when they are married they have to break themselves."

"Then you agree with Uncle William?"

"Oh yes," said the mother tranquilly, "but Eva can be trusted to deal with the matter. She has plenty of commonsense. The main point about the engagement is that they are honestly in love with each other. Things come right when there's plenty of love, when there's enough love." And she really believed that that was all that was necessary.

"You romantic old dear!" He rubbed his curly head against her shoulder in an affectionate manner, for he was still in some ways a boy. Girls were pretty and pleasant creatures, but so far all his kisses had been for his mother, and they were warm and tender kisses. Mrs. Smart felt that when he went a-wooing the woman must be hard and strong who would be able to resist him. But Willy, for all his four and twenty years, had many things to do before he went a-wooing, and some of them he was already eager to set about, one in particular.

"Now give over being proud that you've managed to get a husband for your daughter," said he teasingly, "and think for a moment of poor me."

Mrs. Smart ignored the end of his remark. "Willy, there were lots of them," she cried with a clutch at the ripple of hair which had been laid so confidingly against her shoulder, that broad ripple of which Colonel Smart would have shorn him.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," said he, and leant back out of her reach. "Our Eva is twenty-one you know," and he shook his head, "a really attractive girl would have been married at eighteen, but she, poor child——"

"Ridiculous nonsense!"

"But as I was saying, give over being so unnecessarily cock-a-hoop and," he slapped a broad chest encouragingly, "and think of me."

His mother was contemptuous. "You?"

"Well, my affairs. I mean it, Mother. Things have come to a head in the city and I must know where I stand."

"Yes dearie."

He leant forward suddenly serious. "Addison Senior has finally agreed to launch his boy, and Addison Junior wants to know definitely whether I will come in with him. If I don't, there's Thompson, who would give his eyes for the chance."

"Explain, dearie."

"Well, to be made a member of the Stock Exchange costs several hundred pounds and then a fellow ought to have a bit of capital at the back of him. Addison Senior is backing his boy to the tune of a couple of thousand. Now I know you've got

a stocking mother, but I don't suppose you could manage so much as that for me?"

"It would be an equal partnership if I could?"

"Yes."

"When must you give them an answer?"

"I've a week in which to think it over."

"And you believe this partnership would be likely to do all right?"

"I think so."

"Humph! Well, I might be able to lay my hands on the money." The five thousand pounds were still lying to her credit in the bank. "But I won't do anything in a hurry. Your Uncle William had better see Mr. Addison and talk things over with him. I'll write to-night. Now tell me details, where your offices will be and how you will spend your day, tell me all about everything." She had a wish to understand this mysterious thing which men called business, to push aside the veil which they hung between it and their womenkind.

Willy, grateful and gay-hearted, did his best, but operations, speculations, finance, were nothing to him and presently he came back to his own hopes and wishes, revealing in his happiness more of them than he would have done if he had considered. "I want to make money," he said eagerly.

"Of course," assented the mother.

Secret thoughts and dreams were looking out of the flint-grey eyes. "Ah, but not in order to become a respectable householder in the suburbs," he

said, shattering with his easy words the hope his mother had cherished from his babyhood. "I want money so that I can get away from it all, the days in the city, the nights down here." He moved restlessly and his eyes had a distant look. "Sometimes mater I've felt as if the hours I was living through were each of them valuable things, things that I was losing before I could make use of them."

Mrs. Smart put out a trembling hand and laid it on his knee. She was not a demonstrative woman, but it had suddenly become necessary for her to know that he was still there, still with her in the flesh. The hard bony knee beneath the stout trousering reassured her partially, but she began to wonder whether the business life led by the men about was the right one for her son, whether the path on which she had persuaded him to set his feet would lead to happiness and success. She had looked forward to seeing him a man as much like his fellows as one seed is like the others in a pod. He was to have been a decent and conventional member of suburban society, smart, shrewd, up-to-date, the warden or sidesman of his church, married to one of the pretty girls with whom he danced and played tennis, and the father of healthy boys and girls. A happy life, a useful life, a good life! Could it be that her hopes for him were never to be realised, that his ambitions were not her ambitions, that something beyond her, something which she could not understand, was calling him away. "Oh

Willy," she said. "Oh Willy, my dear, dear boy, what is it that you want?"

He came back to his old place, and with his head upon her shoulder began to tell her of his dreams and longings. "How can I sit on a stool, earning my pound or two a week, when I might be going about, seeing things?"

"You've got to keep yourself."

"Oh, yes, but I'd sooner be a rolling stone than sit here gathering moss, even if the moss were golden. The fellows about are all so certain that the moss business is the right one, but I don't know." He sighed. "Well, I suppose they were cut out for it and I wasn't."

"A rolling stone!" Mrs. Smart echoed him blankly. "And I who thought you liked Eastham and were so keen on its development."

"Oh, mater dear, don't you know that I'm keen on everything—for the time being." He laughed at what he thought his own inconsistency, but his mother could not smile. She had accepted his light enthusiasms and shut her eyes to that underlying seriousness of which, though she would have denied it, she had always known. Now it had pushed its way to the surface and she must admit that this boy of hers was no tame and domesticated creature, such as the men about, but one of the "legion that never was listed." And she regretted it, she who for the first time in her tranquil life was suffering from the heart-ache of all women who have given sons to that strange regiment.

" Perhaps," she faltered, " perhaps you had better not become a stockbroker."

But Willy did not understand his own insistent desires. " Oh, yes," he said quickly, " I want to, you see I can make money that way, make it quickly." He did not know that a man does not choose his career, merely for the pelf that it can bring, but must have a pride in his work, seeing that it is the labour of his little day.

Mrs. Smart's voice sounded curiously dead. Her two children had come to her with their young decisions and she must not oppose either the girl or the boy. Their lives were their own, and she might only help, she must not interfere. " Very well," she said quietly, " then I will go and write to your uncle." But her heart was sad. She would write of the thousands lying idle at the bank, the thousands which had once glittered and scintillated in a glorious heap of gems, she would authorise her brother-in-law to make what arrangements were necessary, but her mind misgave her. She would be tying Willy down, making him responsible, putting him in bonds, he who should—at last she acknowledged it—he who should have been a wanderer over the face of the earth.

CHAPTER XIII

When Archibald Flowerdew found the school not too far from London, of which he believed if it were his, he could make a success, he went to his brother-in-law in perfect confidence that he was offering that man of business a good investment. Matt Johnson was an actuary, a dogged, plain-spoken person, who by dint of hard endeavour had obtained both a good position and the woman upon whom he had set his affections; but as he informed his indignant visitor it was not by entertaining wild-cat schemes that he had reached his present elevation.

"Where is your security?" he asked. He was a short broad man with those vivid blue eyes which in conjunction with black hair are so often to be seen in the pottery district of England.

"Surely my reputation as a teacher is security enough," returned Flowerdew, and was genuinely surprised to hear that it was not.

"If you died——" began the man of business.

"The school could be sold for what I gave, or probably, as I hope to work up the connection, for more."

"You hope to, yes, but you don't know that you will." He shook his head and smiled. "You have only uncertainty to offer me."

Flowerdew was taken aback. "But surely," he said, "I could raise the money by means of insurance?"

"Now you are talking, well?"

"I would insure my life for two thousand pounds and hand over the policy to you."

"If you fell into bad health who would pay the premiums?"

The other was non-plussed. "Oh but," said he, "why should you imagine death, ill-health and failure?"

"We take them into account. You see the matter from your side and I from mine."

"Then it would be of no use my insuring my life?"

"Well, you would have to insure not only for two thousand pounds payable so many years hence, but for as much more as would pay the premiums. It is for you to consider whether you can stand the racket."

Flowerdew did not think he could. He had given anxious consideration to the prospects of the school and though he expected they would improve under his care, he was aware that for one cause or another, the number of pupils had during the past few years, slightly diminished. He would speedily increase the connection, but in order to advertise he must have a little money in hand, and a heavy insurance would hamper him.

"I'll think it over," he said at last.

Really this was a strange world into which he had stumbled, this world of business men. Hitherto hopes, good intentions, character, reputation, had seemed to him valuable assets, but here they appeared to be of no more account than the figments of a dream. It was a chapfallen young schoolmaster who found his way out of the actuary's office.

But his confidence in himself was too strong for him to be easily discouraged; and that evening while recounting to Eva the check which he had received, he made it plain that he hoped soon to find a way out of the difficulty.

"There must be one," he said tranquilly, "and though I feel rather as I did when I was in the Maze at Hampton Court, I shall light on it before long."

The days passed, however, without bringing him the cue he sought and in the end Eva went to her mother. Two thousand pounds was the exact sum that Mrs. Smart intended to settle upon her, and she would be willing to hand this over to him for the purchase of the school. She hoped to find her mother as willing, but in her turn, and to her surprise, was met with difficulties.

"But Mother dear, it is such an opportunity. An old-established school in a good neighbourhood, with splendid playing fields and all the latest improvements in the class rooms, why we shall never have such a chance again."

"Yes dearie, but if all your money is sunk in it you will have nothing to fall back upon."

"But I shan't want anything beyond what the school brings us in. Also Archie would regard it as a loan and hand me over four per cent interest on it and that of course I should save. After all, Mother, any money that you give me will be as much his as mine."

"Not his to play with."

"Still if we don't help the poor boy I don't see how he and I can ever be married."

The argument carried weight. As Eva had made her choice Mrs. Smart, who did not approve of long engagements, would like to see her married and settled; what she did not like was sinking her good money in what seemed a dubious speculation. Archie might be a clever teacher, but how did she know that he had the requisite gifts to make him successful as head master and owner of a school? She had not Eva's faith, she saw too clearly the faults of disposition which might come between the man and success, and yet in the end she allowed herself to be persuaded into doing what she felt was ill-advised. Eva's future, however, was considered. Archie must covenant to pay interest until he could return the borrowed capital, which when returned was to be put into settlement for her and her children; and this he was willing even eager to do. His pride had suffered from his brother-in-law's remarks and it suffered more when Matt

Johnson, one who 'owed no man anything' heard of this arrangement.

His eyebrows went up and he whistled. "Damn funny biz," he said.

"Can't see it," was the languid response.

"You wouldn't."

"That hardly sounds complimentary."

"Oh, to every man his own set of scruples."

"What do you mean?"

"Well I'd be shot before I took a woman's little bit of money to give me a start."

The other had reddened angrily. "It is as much for her sake as mine," he retorted, but Matt said no more. To him nothing that Archie could have urged would have excused his action in the matter, from no point of view was it permissible. But as he had said, "to every man his own set of scruples," and to do him justice, Flowerdew himself, in his blind self-confidence, was quite unable to see that he was wronging the trust of the woman he was about to marry.

It became evident as soon as the purchase money had been found, that Archie with a school would be Archie very much in need of a wife. The engagement with its mingled hopes and fears had already lasted some months. It was therefore decided that the wedding would take place during the Christmas holidays and the young couple settle into Morton House just before the commencement of the January term.

Neither Eva nor her mother wished for other than a conventional wedding, and as long as his bride was robed in white and given to him by the church, Mr. Flowerdew preserved an open mind. It was the women's affair, let them see to it.

The Laurels therefore was swept and garnished, silver-printed invitations were issued, and all Eastham, except the gin-distiller's daughter, who had not heard that there was going to be a wedding, went to see pretty Eva Smart in her robe of purity and with her blushing veil-hidden face walk up the aisle of the dim church and come down radiant, smiling and unveiled, as Mrs. Flowerdew; and that everything was done according to custom is evidenced by the half-column that appeared a few days later in the Eastham *Herald*:—

"There was a large company of guests and relatives at St. Mary's, Eastham Hill, on Wednesday, to witness the wedding of Miss Evangeline Smart, daughter of the late Mr. Richard Smart and Mrs. Smart of The Laurels, Eastham, and grand-daughter of the late Sir Jocelyn Smart of Smarden Priory, with Mr. Archibald Flowerdew, son of the late Mr. Thomas Flowerdew of Queen's Stanton. The service was fully choral and very impressive, the officiating clergy being the Rev. D. S. Smith and the Rev. J. J. Jorrocks. The address was given by the Rev. J. J. Jorrocks, the subject of his discourse being mutual self-sacrifice and its sanctification.

"The bride looked very charming indeed, in an

ivory satin Princess dress, embroidered and trimmed with chiffon and silver tissue. She wore a wreath of orange-blossoms under a tulle veil and carried a bouquet of lilies, the gift of the bridegroom. The bridesmaids were attired in rose pink and wore silver and pink enamel pendants, the gift of the bridegroom.

"The invited guests at the church consisted principally of the nearest relatives of the bride and bridegroom. The presents were numerous and specially choice."

In such manner was Eva wedded to the man to whom she had given love and that pathetic faith of girlhood, a faith so often founded upon quicksands that must eventually engulf it. But illusions are the sheath of the bud, they protect it from the searching winds of reality and when time peels it off, the flower that bourgeons forth, is only the more beautiful for its shielding.

"And in the summer," began Eva, as she stood for the last time a maiden among the white enamelled furniture of her room. On the bed, her travelling gown of royal blue, Archie's choice, lay ready for her to put on and her fingers were busy with the fastenings of the ivory satin. "In the summer you must come to us for a long visit, Mother."

Mrs. Smart, though content, perhaps even pleased to have her daughter married, had been all day on the verge of tears. The necessary preparations,

many of which had been made by her own capable hands, had left her tired; and a marriage is in its own way as emotional a matter as a death. It had seemed to her only right and proper that Colonel Smart should give his niece away; but when she saw him by the chancel steps, she thought with a longing that was pain, of the man in whose place he stood; and so thinking remembered the day of her own wedding, and the shy hopes and shyer fears attendant on it. Richard and she had been married in Ashwater Church early one autumn morning, a misty morning when the grass had been heavily beaded and she had only been able to find a few late rain-washed flowers for the breakfast table to which they would return. It had been a very different wedding to this; but William had come to it, William who of all her husband's family alone was staunch, William who had remained their friend. Again and again during the service the tears had dimmed Minty's eyes and she had blinked them away; and now that her young daughter saying so lightly "we" and "us," having already, though her marriage was not yet three hours old, a home that was not her home, begged her, as one outside the innermost circle, to visit them, her bosom swelled again. She took the satin skirt from the girl's hand and busied herself over its soft breadths, and as she smoothed and folded, her self-control gradually came back to her.

"I shall be very glad to come," she said simply, "but it must be when Willy has his holidays, for I shall not be able to leave him alone here, now that you are—are married."

"No," said Eva softly, "no, of course not, not now that I——" she turned to pick up the bodice of the blue gown, "am married." And then, quite suddenly she was in her mother's arms and the two women were sobbing frankly and undisguisedly. Ah yes, a marriage day is one of many and strange emotions, and it is a curious bride who can go through it from dawn to dusk without a tear.

But the promise made while Eva was turning from a white rose with satin petals and a blush heart, into an ordinary tailor-made traveller, was a promise which had to be kept; and as a consequence another engagement fell to pieces. Mrs. Smart could not both visit Eva and set Tamsin free to go to Cornwall; and when she realised that she must disappoint her mother's old servant, she made amends with a remorseful promise for the following year, a promise which she took care to fulfil.

During the eighteen months which elapsed before she was called upon to do so, a new but not wholly unexpected interest became hers; for toward the end of Eva's first year of married life, the girl came home, and in the white chamber of her girlhood with Mrs. Smart to nurse and cherish her, gave birth to her firstborn. For several months

before this event Mrs. Smart could think of nothing else. The tiny life already stirring beneath her daughter's heart was to her much what her own babies had been, and she waited its entrance into the world, with as much interest as its mother. There might be wars and rumours of wars, dynasties might die out, countries change hands, but to the two women bending over an old carven cradle these things so long as they came not anigh them, mattered very little. Man builds for what he calls eternity, and his buildings fall before the storm and the fire and the earthquake; woman gives life and when all else is swept away, that remains. It is older than the oldest monument, it will outlast the newest law, it is the only thing that though it change is permanent, though again and again it sheds its outer covering is for all time. And there are women who would rather do the finite, showy work of a man, than their own!

Jocelyn Archibald Flowerdew was nine months old when his mother brought him to stay with Mrs. Smart at Oldmeadow Farm. His father had been asked to take some boys to Norway for their summer holidays; and the school not having as yet taken that upward start which its headmaster term after term confidently expected of it, Archie was glad to accept the offer.

The summer had begun early, June having come in with a gush of heat, that too great heat which means anxious work for the doctors, and

Eva with a vision of the cool river and the oak trees had eagerly accepted her mother's invitation. She and little Jocelyn would come on the first of August. On the last day of July, therefore, Mrs. Smart, her mind full of infantile necessities, had come over, only however to find that Tamsin had made all possible arrangements for their comfort.

"Ah be that glad to have 'ee here," she said, her little face all radiant wrinkles. "And Susan her'll look after 'ee, her've come on astonishin' o' late." The two women were walking slowly down the middle path of the vegetable garden. On each side tall bushes of lavender, only lately denuded of their purple heads, alternated with patches of sage and thyme and beyond them were rows of winter kale, and rank upon rank of bright green lettuces. Tamsin looked about her with proud and thankful eyes. "Ah'm a-doin' well, my dear life," she said. "Four cows Ah've got and the li'l heifer has turned out better'n Ah thought she wud."

"How about the turkeys, Tamsin?"

"Comin' on fine they be; last year too they fatted well and Ah sold'n for more'n Ah thought Ah'd get. Turkeys if 'ee can rear 'em, pays." They paused by the nearest of the chicken runs. "Ah'm minded to take a pair o' chickens wi' me to Port Isaac and a ham. Must show they what us can do."

"How long will you be away?" Willy had taken a month's holiday and was bicycling in Scot-

land and she was in no hurry to return to The Laurels.

"'Tis a fortnight 'scursion, why, Ah did tell 'ee so."

"I believe you did, but I have had so many other things to thing about that I forgot."

"Aw likely." To Tamsin the length of her holiday had been one of the many points upon which she had dwelt during the months of patient waiting and anticipation, but she could see that to Mrs. Smart it would be a trifling matter. "Ah reckon," she said thoughtfully, realising what an upheaval in her methodical life this fortnight of idleness must mean, "Ah rackon Ah'll be bra-äve and glad to get back." Once more her eyes strayed over the gentle slope of the big field. At its foot, the river gurgled gently among its stones. The hot and rainless weather had shrunken it to half its width, but the noise of running water persisted, an undertone of cool sound that filled in all the pauses. A string of geese were trailing homeward across the field, the hens were going to roost, the old grey pony was looking over the hedge. His mistress put her hand into her pocket, brought out a cube of sugar and they strolled across to give it to him. The scene was peaceful and drowsy, for the day had been hot and now everything seemed to be seeking sleep.

"Miss Eva'll stop till Ah get back, won't her?" Tamsin said, a little eager note in her voice. Her own people were very far away and dim, but for a

score of years Mrs. Lovell had been dear and her children near. "The ba-äby'll be growin' away fine and Ah want to see'n."

"You must of course," said Mrs. Smart. She found it natural that Tamsin should want to make her grandson's acquaintance. "He is so fine and sturdy and can nearly stand and he has little curls coming all over his head."

"L'il dinky curls?" said the Cornishwoman with enthusiasm as they turned back across the field. "Ah'll love too see'n."

Eva did not reach the farm until some hours after Tamsin had left it. Her mother met her at the station and the two women put Jocelyn into his white baby-carriage and wheeled him along the broad grass riding of the country road.

"It's been a long hot term," Eva Flowerdew said, "and I'm glad to get here, glad too for Archie to go to Norway." She was still very much in love with her husband, but she was physically a little run down. Money had been scarce and in order to help she had given generously of her time and strength, too generously thought Mrs. Smart, who was concerned to see the dark circles under her eyes and the thin line of an erstwhile rounded cheek.

"When are you going to wean that boy?" she asked, as she pushed vigorously at the baby carriage.

How fortunate she was to have her grandchil-

dren while she was still so strong, while she could still enjoy them, play with them, help them.

"Well, I ought to do it now. He was nine months old last week."

"Then you shall and I'll take him at night."

"Oh Mother, how good of you! I was just wondering how to manage."

"Dear little man," and Mrs. Smart looked down at the round face and bright eyes. "I don't believe he'll mind."

"No," said Eva softly, "but I shall."

"There will be others," comforted Mrs. Smart.

"Ah, but he's the first, no other can ever be quite what he has been."

Mrs. Smart glanced at her daughter. How quickly the child was discovering the secrets of life! Looking at her she was again struck by an indefinable expression, a something of worry and anxiety which had dimmed the careless gaiety of Eva's youth. "How is the school doing?" she asked abruptly.

"Archie says it is a case of hastening slowly, but we do really want a few more boys. He talks of advertising in the Irish papers and of a partner who would increase the connection."

"Any new boys coming next term?"

"One," said her daughter, and suppressed the fact that two were leaving.

"I can't quite understand it," Mrs. Smart remarked, as much to herself as to Eva. When she

had gone into the matter, previous to paying over the two thousand pounds, the school had certainly seemed in a flourishing condition. Mr. Flowerdew had now had eighteen months in which to try his theories with regard to advertisement and energetic, up-to-date management, why then was there as yet no result? "You do the housekeeping and save him the cost of a matron, that ought to be a help."

"I daresay it is, but—well, I don't think I'm a very good manager."

"Not a good manager?" exclaimed Mrs. Smart in amazement, "but dearie I've taught you all I know."

"Still, catering for so many boys runs away with more money than it should, at least Archie says so."

"Have you your account book with you?"

"I brought it down. I've been worried about the housekeeping and I thought perhaps you would help me."

And one afternoon when she and her mother were sitting sewing under the shade of a walnut-tree by the river, with the baby lying on a rug at their feet and the whisper of the water in their ears, Eva produced a little packet of tradesmen's books and the long slim reckoner in which she kept her accounts. Mrs. Smart studied them in silence for a time.

"Somebody is extravagant," she said at last.

Mrs. Flowerdew's face which in the peace of uneventful days was losing its look of anxiety, grew

suddenly hot. "Archie is difficult to feed," she said, "he has a very tiresome digestion."

"But sweetbreads at half a crown each! Why don't you give him brains?"

"He knows the difference."

"Humph!" said the elder woman, pursing up lips of disapproval, "and birds—birds—birds."

"We only have them occasionally," pleaded the daughter. "Archie says that in the season you ought to have a bird every evening."

"But you are young people just beginning, you cannot afford these luxuries." Though she spoke quietly, she was inwardly much disturbed. The tradesmen's books gave unmistakable evidence of rash expenditure, and if in spite of Eva's careful hand an undue amount of money ran away in that direction, it was unlikely that thrift was being exercised in other departments. She went on with her methodical examination of the books.

"Mother," said Eva, interrupting her, "what do you think people like ourselves ought to spend on our wine-bill a week?"

"Your wine bill?" cried her astonished parent.

"I mean on that part of our grocery bill."

"We," said Mrs. Smart, "spend eighteenpence. Willy has beer with his dinner as you know, but he doesn't take more than one glass and I, like you, have always drunk water. A Jew I once met told me that the reason his people were able to save out of a small income was because they never wasted

their money on liquor and that what we spent on soda-water, ale and spirits always amazed him."

"Eighteenpence a week," said Eva slowly, "that is very little."

"What does Archie drink?" asked her mother.

"He likes a little whiskey and soda with his meals." She was consciously throwing dust in Mrs. Smart's eyes, for Archie liked more than a little and she, though she excused him even to herself, was becoming aware of it.

"With his meals!" repeated the other. "You don't mean to say he takes it with his luncheon?"

"He wouldn't enjoy his food without, mother, and I must think of that."

Mrs. Smart looked at her seriously for a moment, but she said no more. Until the girl would acknowledge that her husband was weak and self-indulgent, nothing could be done. She did not know that the two, sometimes three, bottles of whiskey a week, which Eva's grocery book shewed—that grocery book which had been so carefully left at home,—were the cause of her frequent fits of depression. But Archie was gone to Norway and in Norway, so his wife understood, a beneficent law had been passed which forbade the sale of spirits unless under doctors' orders. "You see," said the girl, "it is all very different when a man has a poor digestion."

"Well, well," said her mother briskly, "I dare-say a bottle lasts you a fortnight and that does not

mean a great outlay. You can get a good whiskey for three and six."

Eva looked uncomfortable. "When people drop in," she said vaguely, "of course we must have spirits for them and sometimes that means a little extra." She did not add as she might have done, that Archie preferred a whiskey at four shillings the bottle.

"Oh, of course, but I'm sorry it's the custom; I've long thought it a pity to offer spirits to boys, for they don't like to refuse, and bye and bye they get to like the stuff."

Eva nodded, for she was by this time entirely of her mother's opinion. "Life is rather a struggle," she observed presently. "I suppose with young people just beginning it is bound to be."

"Well I think so, at least with most. You see the income is small and the babies are coming and the wife's health suffers; but those years are also the most interesting. The love's fresh, and the babies are fresh and the work's fresh. Afterwards well, the sparkle seems to die out of it all and you settle down."

"You see, Mother," Eva was pursuing her own thoughts rather than listening to Mrs. Smart's homely wisdom, "it is not so very wonderful that we don't get as many new boys as we want."

"Why dearie?"

"Well, Archie's manner——"

"I know."

"He doesn't mean it of course, and he says when a man is over thirty he can't change and perhaps he can't, but it is unfortunate. Now the other day a Mr. Salmon came to look over the school. He was a tea-broker, whatever that may be, and his fat was all in one place or mostly all, and he was dark, with whiskers and a bald head, you know the sort of man?"

"Yes."

"If Archie had only happened to be out, I would have taken him round and he'd have gone away thinking himself no end of a fine fellow and the little Salmons would have come to us."

"But Archie was at home?"

"Yes, so he took the man round, and oh, he looked so handsome beside that common little tub of a man! He has a fine head, you know Mother, and such a graceful walk."

"Yes Eva, but the man."

"Oh, of course Archie made him feel just how common and uninteresting he was; so he crawled away from our front door and his sons are going elsewhere. He has five sons."

"Perhaps Archie doesn't want that class of boy?"

"That's what he says. But Mother, we must start with what we can get."

Mrs. Smart closed the last of the account books and slipped round the collection an elastic band. "It's a blessing you have so much commonsense," she said.

"Archie will come to it in time," pursued her daughter with a smile. "After all the wolf outside the door and a baby inside make a difference to a man's view of matters. Already I have half persuaded him to let me look after the preliminaries. The fact is the dear boy is too clever and parents like you to be commonplace. Now I suit them beautifully."

"They say 'experience teaches,'" replied her mother, "but I know of a master whose lessons are better learned."

"And that?"

"Is necessity," replied Mrs. Smart and Eva, secretly anxious, could only agree with her.

The fortnight, day after day spent with little Jocelyn who viewed his mother's conduct with equanimity and settled to his new food with a masculine appreciation of variety, passed all too quickly. Long sleep-filled nights gave Eva back her roses, and the care of the farm broods distracted her thoughts. She went with her mother from barn to byre, as interested as had been her forebears, in all that had to do with dairy, hen-roost and the rearing of stock. So engrossed were mother and daughter indeed that the day of Tamsin's return came upon them as a surprise; and if Susan Field had not spoken of it, it is doubtful whether either of them would have remembered.

"You don't mean to say it's the fifteenth?" Mrs. Smart had exclaimed. "Dear me and somehow

I'd looked forward to seeing those late broods out before she came back."

"I can't have been here a whole fortnight!" Eva had cried as she picked up her fat baby, preparatory to carrying him off to the orchard for the morning. "Really this is a wonderful place, I never felt so well in my life."

"When you first came Jocelyn was almost too heavy for you to lift," smiled her mother; and Eva, to show her strength, tossed him about in her arms, the baby gurgling and crowing with joy.

"Ah, but it's different now," she murmured and stood still for a moment meditating. "After all," she said at last, "one's troubles seem to be mainly a matter of health, I feel now as if mine had been only night-mares."

And Mrs. Smart hoped that her words might be prophetic, she hoped but she was a woman of little faith.

When Tamsin, hot and dusty, made her appearance, both mother and daughter exclaimed at the change which fourteen days among old friends had wrought in her. The Tamsin who had left Oldmeadow Farm had been an ageing woman, with thin brown hair drawn tightly back into a small knob, and a manner upon which long servitude had laid its repressing hand. The Tamsin who returned was a composed personage with a young note in her voice, and a restrained but evident sense of her own importance.

"Ah've had a bra-äve time," she said when questioned, "and Ah'm made over that's what 'tes. A person can't feel old, when she've a father and mother still fine and hearty."

But Mrs. Smart, her eyes upon the raised and curled hair beneath Tamsin's black hat opined that there was more in the matter than the mere re-discovery of her parents, and the Cornishwoman did not altogether deny it. Eva however, with her feeling that the world is for the young, was conscious of the absurdity of her mother's suggestion. Tamsin was fifty-four, an old woman; how silly of her to set her hat on at an angle and swathe her throat in imitation lace. She had even bought herself a coloured parasol. What did she want with parasols? Those brown and wrinkled features had hitherto faced all weathers, rain and shine; why at fifty-four should they feel the need of shelter and protection? Mrs. Flowerdew did not join in her mother's gentle rallying of the old servant, indeed she thought it absurd and almost undignified, for as yet, though wife and mother, she stood only on the threshold of life and believed an old body must necessarily house an old heart.

After Susan Field was gone home—she slept with her parents in a thatched, white-walled cot further down the road—the three women carried their chairs into the garden and planted them about the broad doorstep. Jocelyn being asleep in an upper room, they might not stray from the neigh-

bourhood of his latticed window, moreover, Tamsin was tired after her journey. She leant back in the old basket chair, and her Cornish voice, blurred and soft, stole out upon the quiet, as she recounted her doings in little grey Port Isaac.

"Two and twanty year Ah bin away, and Ah cud find my way same as if't had been yesterday."

"But the people," said Eva, "they must have altered, they must have grown older." She did not yet know that people of the same generation do not seem to each other to greatly change, whatever the flight of time.

Tamsin, with what on younger cheeks would have been a blush, admitted that they were older, but not so very; she had thought to see a greater difference, and had found them much the same, all her old friends. "The sea have taken some, it do take a big toll of the men," she said sadly.

"And the women?" asked Eva.

"They dies." But her voice was no longer sad. Some poor creature's passing was evidently unregretted. "Aw there, Ah may's well tell 'ee." She paused, striving in the dusk to read the faces turned towards her, and failing. "Ah do think to marry!" she said, and without waiting for their comments hurried on. "'Tes la-äte, Ah knaw, but 'tisn't as if he was a stranger, for 'ee've heard me speak o' Jan Honey, as Ah knawed when Ah was a maid going to school."

Mrs. Smart nodded kindly. She might have mar-

ried again if she had chosen, and she knew that men and women love and love again, whatever the time of day.

"'Iss, Ah knawed'n then and us sweethearted a bit, but my aunt up to Launceston was in want of a little maid for to help her about the house and mother fitted me out and Ah went, and then Ah come here. Jan, â cudn't write, so â married Loveday Blake of Delabole. Her father worked in the quarries and times at the fishing, and her'd always wanted Jan. Last year she come to die, and their children all being out and married, he fare lonely. And then me coming back, it seemed as if it was to be, but he can't come here, he've got a trawler of's own and two of's lads work'n, so he'm Cap'n Honey, and 'twudn't suit him to be in a pla-äce like this."

"Then what will you do?" said Eva curiously. The recital of this long past story had had a softening effect. After all, Tamsin, withered old apple, had had a cherished sweetness at the core of her.

"My dear life, if 'ee cud tell me what to do, Ah'd thank 'ee. Ah'm fair torn in half about'n. Ah'd like fine to live in Port Isaac among they as Ah've knawed since Ah was so high, and yet Ah'm bound to be here. There's no gettin' out of it either way."

"What does Captain Honey say?"

"He says, 'Give over the farmin' and Ah'll give over the fishin',' and us cud do't. Us have saved a bra-äve bit."

"Give over the farming?" repeated Mrs. Smart. The time had not yet come for the Oldmeadow Estate to be cut up into lots and let for building, and she wondered what she would do if the place were left on her hands. She did not fancy seeing strangers in her mother's house.

Tamsin looked away across the dim grey landscape. "Ah don't think as Ah could," she said despairingly. It was evident that she had spoken no more than the truth when she had said she was "fair torn in half about'n."

"Poor Captain Honey," said Eva. She wondered how Tamsin could hesitate, when, after so many years, she and her early love had had the path made straight before them.

"There 'tis," said the distracted maiden. "Ah mayn't never get another offer."

Mrs. Smart laughed softly, but Eva only felt annoyed. "If that is the way you look at it," she said severely, "you might as well stay on here."

"Jan says him'll wait till neist year," continued Tamsin, far from grasping Mrs. Flowerdew's train of thought, "but there's more women nor men to Port Isaac, seeing as a many that go down to the sea in ships don't never return. Still," and the doleful, anxious voice took on a more cheerful tone, "still my sister, as he did look at, no doubt because her features me a li'l bit, her hasn't any savings. He'd have to support she, and he hasn't more'n enough for'mself. That'll make a difference to he."

She nodded shrewdly. "Oh, 'iss, Ah rackon him'll keep his pramuss. Ah rackon him'll wait till neist summer."

"You mean to go down again?" asked Mrs. Smart. She was purposely withholding her opinion of the marriage.

"Ah do want to," admitted Tamsin. By then she would have made up her mind, would have decided whether Captain Honey or Oldmeadow Farm stood higher in her regard.

Eva pushed back her chair. "I think I hear Jocelyn," she said in an unsympathetic voice. "Good-night, Tamsin; mother, you'll come to my room, won't you?" and she went in.

"Seeing as her's married, she don't feel to take an interest in a maiden's affairs," said the Cornishwoman, and again Mrs. Smart laughed.

"Eva doesn't understand," she said. "Young people are like that, between twenty and thirty is a lifetime to them. As for you, Tamsin, well, I think I should like to do this again. I don't know when I have enjoyed a fortnight so much!"

And Tamsin thanked her with a fervour which had in it more than a touch of youth. After all, the twenties have not the monopoly of sweet and desirable things.

CHAPTER XIV

LITTLE Jocelyn was cutting teeth, and to his young mother's alarm, his temperature had risen. The term was in full swing, Mr. Flowerdew taking with him a pile of exercise books had gone to his study, the boys were in bed, and Eva was alone with her feverish baby. She was anxious with the anxiety of inexperience; and all the terrible stories of childish misadventure that she had ever heard came crowding into her mind. Little Jocelyn wailed and refused his food, and at last his mother felt it would be better to send for the doctor. After all, the trouble might not be his teeth, he might be sickening for some little ailment. There were one or two suspicious spots on his legs; and, on the whole, she would be very glad to shift the responsibility from her shoulders to those of someone with a little knowledge.

But before sending, she must of course consult her husband. He might not think it necessary, for the baby was a strong and healthy child, and the expense of a doctor's bill was one which they were not anxious to incur. Archie might tell her she was making a fuss about nothing—he had a marital way of calming her fears—and that it would be better to wait till the morning.

Giving the fretful baby to the nursemaid, she went down to the study, and with her mind occupied by other matters, came full upon the trouble which for months she had been unconsciously stalking.

The study at Morton House was the most comfortable room on the ground floor. Its French windows opened upon a slope of greensward, and from the hollows below a solitary beech, spreading and rounded, lifted its smooth bole and lofty crown. The room itself, though small, was full of carefully harmonised furniture, most of which had been purchased at sales. A small pedestal writing-table stood beneath a green-shaded light, and on one side of the fireplace in a deep recess was a divan. This Eva had covered with the dim brocade which had been her grandmother's, and on it her husband now lay asleep.

The peace and quiet of the little room, with its dull-hued carpet, its lining of books and its small twinkling fire, fell like balm upon the young mother's anxious heart. She felt that she was perhaps exaggerating the baby's indisposition, that he was only fretful, and that it would be foolish to send for a medical man. Coming quietly forward, she stood for a minute looking down upon her husband's broad shoulders, finely moulded head and six foot of graceful length. How much she hoped that little Jocelyn might grow up to resemble him—Jocelyn, whose baby head was already sunned over with Smart curls and in whose blue eyes specks of

brown had begun to form. Of Eva's children, it was not her eldest son who would resemble his father.

As she stood beside her husband, her admiring heart full of his perfections, it struck her that he looked tired. He was lying on his back, and his sleek hair, having been pushed off his forehead, had an unkempt appearance, while his face, except for the heavy, deeply coloured eyelids, was curiously pale. "Poor boy," she thought, her anxiety at once transferred from the one to the other of her treasures, "I won't disturb him," and she was turning away when the man opened his eyes.

For a moment he looked as if he did not recognise her, and then a foolish smile dawned on his face. "Kiss me," he said rather thickly.

Eva bent over him unsuspiciously, but his breath reeked of spirits, and though the strange unpleasant smell had lately grown familiar, a misgiving shot into her mind. She drew back and stood looking at him.

"What's er matter?" he asked, in the same thick voice.

"What have you been doing, Archie?" When she had before remarked the smell of whiskey, he had excused himself on that familiar plea of indigestion, and Eva, being so ignorant, had accepted it.

The question annoyed him. "Nothing," he said, with a sudden change from fatuous amiability to

ill-temper. "What should I have been doing? Tired, so went to sleep."

"Well, it's past ten now, and you had better come to bed."

"Oh, yes—come in a minute." His eyes closed and quite suddenly he began to draw deep and noisy breaths. He had fallen asleep again, and so quickly that for the moment she felt bewildered. Then she shook him a little.

"Come to bed," she said, an unwonted firmness in her tone.

Archie opened his eyes, smiled, and made an effort to obey. But when he was on his feet, he staggered suddenly; and Eva, terrified, caught his arm and pushed him back on to the divan. He looked up at her, the foolish smile still on his face. "Been on the spree a bit," he said explanatorily. "Man must have some amusement. Better presently."

He was beyond seeing the incredulous horror on her face. "You can't walk up to bed," she said. She was not asking a question, she was affirming a fact—oh, not a fact, surely not. It was ill-health—weakness—and he had not known what he was saying. It could not be that such a terrible thing was true.

Archie, who had become portentously solemn, shook his head. "No," he assented amiably. "You're ri'. Can't walk up to bed. Head's clear enough, but legs gone. Be all right presently. You

leave me alone, like good girl, and I'll have a sleep. Be all right then." And before his wife's horrified and incredulous gaze, he leant back among the cushions and sank into a drunken slumber.

As if automatically the girl made up the fire, turned out the green-shaded light, and put a rug over the sleeping man. It was evident that she must leave her husband to sleep off the first effects of what he had taken, and that she could do no good by remaining with him, while Jocelyn at least needed her. Before she could go upstairs, however, a number of small details claimed her attention. Never before had Eva thought so clearly, been so ready, and done everything so easily. The outer doors and ground floor windows were quickly secured, the dormitories visited, the lights turned out. In those upper rooms the little boys, each under his scarlet coverlet, lay fast asleep, their smooth young faces flushed with slumber, their breath coming slowly and healthfully. Eva wondered if they, seemingly so innocent, had only to grow up to develop some weakness, some hurtful vice. She felt a little bitter. Why should trouble have befallen her; how had she deserved it, she who did, had always done, the best she could? For some minutes she stood staring down, in anxious fashion, upon a little curly-headed boy whom, as a matter of fact, she hardly saw, and then, recollecting herself she continued her round. But everything in the house was as it should be. The assistant masters were in their rooms the serv-

ants in bed, and she could turn out the last gas jet and go to her own place.

With a feeling of relief she changed her simple dinner dress for a loose woollen gown and returned to the baby. Now, at last, she would be free to think, to realise the situation, to consider what should be her course of action.

Little Jocelyn was very tired, and he resented the dull pushing ache that kept him from his sleep. At sight of his mother he put out his arms with a weary cry, and she caught him to her with the echo of it. Oh, the comfort of him! After the terrible experience of the past hour, what a relief to come into the firelit, lamplit peace of the little nursery!

"Go to bed, Annie," she said gently. "I can manage with baby for to-night," and to his visible satisfaction, she seated herself with him in a low chair. She had never failed him, she had always brought food and warmth and comfort, surely she would be able to help him now. He gazed up at her out of his tired eyes, with the faith of ignorance, that faith which we older folk give to the Infinite.

The nurse brought some prepared invalid food, for Jocelyn had refused his milk. "Put the Benger ready in that little saucepan," said Mrs. Flowerdew, "then I can warm it without getting up." And the woman having done so, went thankfully away. There was no crisis in her life, and sleep beckoned.

Eva held the baby very closely, and something in

the clasp of her arms, in the measured rocking of the little chair, soothed him. The protesting cries grew fewer and less loud, and at times the eyelids closed over the dark eyes, to open every few minutes or so with a jerk, as the pain, the gnawing, cutting pain returned.

"My poor little son," said Eva, and forgot him presently in thinking of her husband.

She had been a wife not quite two years, she was only twenty-three, light-hearted, happy, a mere girl —and she had had this terrible awakening. She had been forced to realise that the man she loved, to whom indeed she was devoted, whom she had looked on as a prince among men, that he drank. Eva had not before been brought into contact with this particular weakness of poor humanity. In her family it was unknown, and if her friends had not been altogether so fortunate, Eva was unaware of it. She knew many things vaguely. Knew that some people took more wine, beer and spirits than was good for them; indeed, that Mrs. Thompson, their doctor's wife, was one of these strangely constituted persons; but she had not imagined the evil of drink could ever come anigh her.

If it had only been a cousin or a friend or an acquaintance, anyone at a little distance, anyone who did not matter; but it was her husband. She felt both horrified and repelled. What was it that her mother had said? "Selfish and self-indulgent!" And had she not averred that women were too often

"a cushion" when they should have been "an encouragement"? She, Eva, would not be a cushion. She did not feel like it, not in the least. She wanted this horrible state of affairs to come to an end, wanted to find again the Archie of other days, the man whom she had married; and she was willing to make an effort, any effort, to get him back. Surely if they two met and struggled with the insidious enemy, they must prevail. Hitherto she had listened to her husband's pleas and had supplied him with what he had maintained to be necessary, had spoilt him a little, as girl-wives, ay, and their elders, will. But there should be no more of it. Digestion or indigestion, Archie must go without his palliative. In their house alcohol should be tabooed. She was full of the horror of her discovery, the horror and the shame. Were there people outside the four dear walls that closing about a little space had made it home—people who suspected, who whispered? She remembered the scandal at Eastham when Mrs. Thompson, the doctor's wife, had strayed on unsteady feet into the post-office. Did people know about Archie? She hoped not, she even thought not, for if she, his wife, had been ignorant, how could those who stood further from him even have suspected? And they must not know. She and he must fight this weakness and bring it under before ever a murmur got about. Only so would she be able to hold up her proud young head.

This weakness!

At last she was face to face with the fact that Archie was not the man she had believed him. She had idealised because she loved, and now the winds of chance, blowing aside an edge of his garment, had shewn the feet of clay. Mrs. Smart had said that men, even the best of them, were unsatisfactory creatures, had warned her not to expect too much of them, not to judge. They had their good qualities, their special qualities, but they were neither gods nor heroes. "Surely I have not expected too much of Archie?" said poor, disillusioned Eva, and sat aghast at the thought. But no, she had only expected of him the clean commonplaces of everyday middle-class life, and those, she was sure, she would continue to expect.

The baby was gradually becoming less fretful, a tiny point had pressed its cruel way through the pink gum and the inflammation was subsiding. Eva warmed the Benger and fed it to him with a spoon. Her child had never had a bottle, never seen one of those strange "comforters" which, kind only to be cruel, are said to have so ill an after-effect upon mouth and dentition. He was as healthy a little boy as lived; and Eva, unlike the modern mother, would have endured any discomfort rather than have jeopardised his future well-being.

The warm food had a soothing quality, and the little fellow presently dropped off to sleep. He had outgrown the old oak cradle and had lately been promoted to an iron cot, the four brass knobs of

which, to his infantile mind, were certainly the most beautiful and desirable things in the world. The night was wearing away, and his mother, seeing that his slumber was that of a very tired child, laid him down on his own bed and drew the small blue eiderdown high up about him. He whimpered once or twice, but the pain was gone and he was very sleepy, and in a few minutes she saw that it would be safe to leave him.

It is seldom that we come to a crisis in life without being buoyed up by a strange exultation. On the preceding evening Eva had been tired after her day's work. If her child had slept she would have done the same; she had indeed wondered how she was to keep awake through the long hours of darkness. But once she realised her husband's condition and the responsibility which, by making himself irresponsible, he had thrust upon her—and sleep became an impossibility. She was widely, alertly awake. It was as if the helm of a ship, when shipwreck was imminent, had been thrust into her hand and she had taken hold.

The clock on the mantel-shelf suddenly chimed the hour, and Eva, counting the strokes, saw that it was time for her to go and rouse her husband. Before long the maids would be stirring, and they must not know how or where he had spent the night. Fortunately they slept in two big attics at the top of the house and would not be likely to hear any sound that might be made; but for all that, she

moved cautiously, turning her door-handle with care and slipping noiselessly down the stairs.

In the study darkness reigned, for the last ashes of the fire were fallen together and heavy curtains shut out the grey freshness of the night. Mrs. Flowerdew went up to them and pulled them apart. Outside the grass was silvered with dew and a breeze was blowing, a breeze that ruffled the top leaves of the beech and pulled at the yellowing foliage. The air of the room was heavily reminiscent of the events of the preceding evening, and as she stood looking out upon the dim world the girl felt a sudden longing for clean air, and unlatching one of the windows, pushed it open. The rush of the wind was invigorating after her vigil, and she stood leaning out and drawing deep sweet breaths, until an irritable voice from the other end of the room bade her come in and have done with such foolishness.

"It's as cold as frogs," Mr. Flowerdew murmured, sitting up on the divan, "and you are in your dressing-gown."

Eva closed the window and came slowly across the room to him. The time had come for an explanation, and she had thought she would be afraid to ask it of him. But she was not.

"You were drunk last night," she said, a certain hard quality in her voice. If she could, she meant to shatter his self-esteem.

The man upon the sofa hunched his shoulders.

He was suffering from the effects of his carouse, and he did not want to be bothered. "What of it?" he said.

"You do not take whiskey for the sake of your digestion, you take it because you like it, because you like to drink."

Her husband looked at her in amazement and dawning wrath. How dared she speak to him like this? What did she mean by it? "Pardon me," he said sneeringly, "I take it for its stimulating effects."

His wife ignored the sneer and went on with her accusation. "And you have not the self-control to take only what would be stimulating."

"Oh, don't bother yourself with my concerns. I do as I please."

"And you please," she dared all things in her last words, "you please to make yourself irresponsibly, swinishly drunk."

Her words, incisive, hard, unemotional, fell on him like blows from a hammer. His head was aching and he felt more than a little sick, but he was furious. She was bearding him, his gentle, his hitherto obedient wife! He rose to his feet, looking down on her five foot eight from his greater height, but it did not seem as if he were the taller. "You suggest," he said between his teeth, "you suggest that I am a drunkard?"

"I suggest nothing. Last night I saw you drunk."

The man turned aside. "Oh, go to hell!"

But Eva stood her ground, a steadfast figure in the loosely falling dark red gown. "I have been up all night," she said, "thinking."

Archie moved restlessly about. "Does that justify you," he asked, "in making me this scene?"

"I do not need any justification. I have been looking back, Archie, back to the time before we were married. And I see that you took too much then, that you have always taken too much."

The man was bent upon causing her to lose her temper. "It was a pity you did not see it then. If you had, we might have been spared the commission of a mistake."

But she would not acknowledge that she was hurt. "As you say, it was a pity," she returned, her steady eyes upon his face, and it was his temper that gave.

"You dare to tell me that you regret our marriage?"

Eva almost smiled. How childish of him to be playing with words, scolding, striving to irritate, when they were talking of such weighty matters. "Who would not regret having tied herself for life to a man that drank?" she answered steadily.

"I don't drink, damn you!" stormed Flowerdew suddenly. "And if I did, it's none of your business. I shall jolly well do as I please. What do you mean by taking this tone to me? I won't be

lectured as if I were a child." He walked towards her, his face very pale, his mien threatening. Between them stood the little pedestal table, and on it was a heavy cut-glass bottle, generally used to hold whiskey. Flowerdew's hand fell on this, and he raised it menacingly. "The sooner you drop this nonsense the better for you, for I tell you I won't stand it." He added one or two furious oaths. "Get out of this," he cried, "or I won't answer for myself."

Eva knew that her husband was a man of ill-governed passions, and she believed madness and uncontrollable anger to be near akin. The tragedies of which she had read in the daily papers, the cruelties, woundings, murders, seemed not so much due to evil intent as to the wild impulses of a tempestuous hour. Until this moment, though she had often seen Archie out of humour, she had never seen him in a rage, and to her he looked terrible. His blue eyes sparkled and his fair brows were drawn together above them, so that two deep perpendicular lines divided his forehead. His upper lip was drawn back, shewing the strong and white teeth, and his head and arm were thrust forward, menacing her. She supposed that if she did not yield to the terror possessing her, and shrink away, in another moment the heavy bottle would come crashing down upon her skull. But something in her surged up from the depths; and as distinctly as if they had been spoken, two sentences formed

themselves before her. "I can only die once!" and "It would be better to die than to give in."

In a second she was resolved. She did not flinch, but with an effort which she thought must be visible, so great was it, she raised her eyes. She did not speak, but as her eyes, steadfast, unyielding, unafraid, met his, her husband's hand sank to his side and the bottle fell out of it.

"Oh, Eva, Eva!" he cried, in sudden revulsion of feeling, "save me from myself!" and in a moment she was in his arms and the tears were flowing.

They went up to their room together, and Flowerdew made full confession. He did not want to drink and he would give it up, with Eva's help he could do so easily. He would only take a little——

"None at all," said Eva.

"Oh, but that's nonsense. A man must have an occasional drink."

"No," and she shook her head.

"Oh, come, dear."

But his prestige had been irretrievably damaged and she would not give in. "I did not see it at the time, indeed I never realised it till last night, but it was all wrong, everything," she said. "You took too much a week, too much a day, too much a drink, and now we must make a clean sweep, we must start afresh."

Flowerdew held out his arms with a pathetic gesture. "You love me, Eva?"

His wife responded fervently. "Oh, I love you, I love you more than ever I did." And it was true. She was nearer to him, she understood him better, found him more human, and if there were pity mingled with the love, she did not know it.

They lay talking when Eva, at least, should have been asleep, but her exaltation had not quite died away, and Archie, now that the flood-gates were open, had many things to tell. For the first time she heard of early struggles, of the onset of the habit, of excuses still half credited, and a gradual hardening of moral cuticle. But he was anxious to reform, really anxious to climb back to self-mastery, and in the end he promised all that she asked. He would give it up, would drink nothing but water, and she must help him. And Eva agreed. She did not yet know that it rests with the wrong-doer whether he will cease to do evil and learn to do good, that he and he only can work out his salvation.

CHAPTER XV

"And how is Willy?" said Eva, putting the question perfunctorily, for of course he was well and doing well and could have no history. But Mrs. Smart, who had come over for the day, thought differently.

Between Morton House and its gate was a well-gravelled drive some two hundred yards in length which was shaded from the sun by young home-oaks. Eva and her mother, pushing the baby-carriage between them, were strolling up and down, talking as they went, and beyond the shelter of the garden the March wind was twisting the dust of the road into strange spirals and founts.

"I am anxious about Willy," she said.

"Anxious?" queried Mrs. Flowerdew. During the last five months she had come to understand the meaning of the word, to understand it so well that she felt Mrs. Smart must be exaggerating. Why should she be anxious about Willy, Willy of all people? Now, if it had been Archie——

"It is all very well for a man to take an interest in his business, but Willy is too keen."

Eva almost laughed. "He wants to get on," she said cheerfully.

"But he doesn't sleep well and he doesn't eat

well; he does nothing but study the business columns of the papers and make calculations on little pieces of paper."

"Persuade him to take a good holiday this year."

"It sounds as if he were overdoing it, doesn't it, dearie?"

"Well, yes, it does," Eva answered. "I suppose he gets on all right with his partner?"

"I don't know. Addison hasn't been down lately; too busy, he says. A new company is being started and their firm has to do with it. I don't quite understand how or why or what they do, but it keeps Willy working late of a night."

Eva turned the baby-carriage. "Once more down the drive and I think we may go in," she said. "But seriously, Mother, I shouldn't worry about Willy. It's a young business and is sure to have its ups and downs, and no doubt he gets worried at times. I should like to see the man who doesn't."

"But I am afraid," Mrs. Smart breathed it softly. "I am afraid he is speculating."

"Isn't that what stockbrokers do?"

"Oh no, not with their own money."

"Only with other people's? I see. But does it matter if he speculates?"

"He might lose his little bit of capital."

"Well, of course."

"But I don't think that is all. I fancy there are penalties attached to his doing so."

"Oh really; who attaches them?"

Mrs. Smart did not know. "Oh—er—the Stock Exchange, I suppose," she said vaguely.

"But I thought that was a place?"

"Well, yes; still I think there's someone who makes rules that all these people have to keep; perhaps it's a committee."

"You don't know much about it, Mother, do you?"

"Why no, dearie, and if it weren't for Willy being a stockbroker I shouldn't want to know. But I can see that things are going badly, or at least not smoothly with the lad, and it makes me wonder whether I did well in starting him on his own. He was young to have so much responsibility."

Eva sighed. What a joy-killer was this same responsibility. "You started him and you started us," she said slowly. "It is two years ago last Christmas, and you gave us each the same sum of money."

"No dearie, I gave him a little more, the little that made him a stockbroker."

"Ah well, it was practically the same. Do you remember, Mother, how I badgered you to let me have it and all you said?"

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Smart. She was listening to the crunching sound of their feet upon the gravel and enjoying the sunshine and the keen air. "I did not think you were wise."

"And I wasn't."

"Well, well, experience teaches."

Eva sighed again. "It's a hard school," she said ruefully. "Why should it be necessary for people to go through such a lot, just in order to get a little wisdom?"

But Mrs. Smart was only interested in the concrete.

"Do you wish I hadn't given it to you?" she asked.

"I think I do."

"Why dearie?"

"Well," said her daughter slowly, "you see this is a big undertaking, and it suffers from our want of capital, and we suffer, too. We never know what a day may bring forth, and oh Mother, the constant anxiety!"

"But if I hadn't helped you——"

"That's just it, and I wouldn't be without Archie for the world. But it's so wearing to be for ever counting your pennies and trying to keep up appearances, and I get tired of it. You see, Mother, I'm not so very old, and I look at the other girls, all so gay and careless, and then I feel I could do without this bothering old school."

"But when you wrote last you told me matters were improving."

"They've got to improve such a very long way before it makes any difference."

"And how's Archie?"

"Since early last October," said his wife, a thankful note in her voice, "he has been much

better, much stronger, a different man. He doesn't sleep very well but that's nothing."

"Doesn't sleep well?"

"Oh, I don't think his not sleeping amounts to much. But he has had a bed put in his dressing-room, and when he fancies he's going to have a bad night he spends it there. The wall is not very thick, and I often hear him snoring, so I don't fancy he is as bad as he thinks."

"Any new boys?"

"We've four coming next term. Archie put advertisements in the Irish papers, and the result has been most encouraging. He is taking these boys at a reduced rate because he thinks they will bring others. And already we've had inquiries from one or two more."

"That looks well."

"Oh, yes," said Eva impatiently, "I suppose I ought not to grumble. Archie says we've turned the corner, and perhaps we have, but to-day, for no reason at all, I'm feeling depressed." She turned the baby-carriage out of the drive and brought it across the open space of gravel in front of the porch. Her mother followed more slowly, and Mrs. Flowerdew, glancing back to speak to her, perceived that a cab was stopping at the gate. "Visitors!" she exclaimed. "And as Archie is at the football match, I shall have them all to myself. What a good thing!" And she wheeled Jocelyn quickly into the square tesselated hall.

"You will see them?" inquired Mrs. Smart. She was there on such a short visit that she grudged these strangers any of her daughter's attention.

"I must; you see it might be a parent."

Themselves concealed by the darkness of the hall, they paused to watch the four-wheeler disgorge its load. A slim man in blue serge, with a check cap and marked features, a man with an indefinable air of horsiness about him, had stepped out, followed by a broad personage in tweeds and a gay necktie, and these two were assisting a third.

"Why," said Mrs. Smart innocently, "it's somebody who is ill, and he is in grey. Archie had on a grey suit. There must have been an accident."

Eva had turned white. She remembered and she feared. An accident? If it were only that! But whatever it was, she must be ready. She rang a little bell that stood on the table of the hat-rack, and handed Jocelyn to the first servant who came. "Take him to the nursery," she said quietly, "and take him up the back staircase."

When she rejoined her mother, the two men, supporting the third between them, were walking slowly towards her up the drive.

"It is Archie," said Mrs. Smart. "He must have hurt himself."

Eva was strangely calm. "He wasn't playing in the match," she said. "He—he may not be hurt." And suspicions which had haunted her for months,

which she had put aside as unworthy of them both, crowded back upon her. She stared out at the approaching group, the good-natured helpers and that shambling figure in the middle, and her face hardened. With our penny, all that we have, we start for the world's market, and once arrived, change it sooner or later for some package out of the lucky tub. Eva had spent her penny, had drawn her prize, and there was nothing more for her. She stepped past her mother, and the sunlight fell through the glass of the little porch, illuminating her tall figure and warming her. But for all that, she shivered, as if the winds blowing coldly through shattered, roofless walls were blowing upon her. The prize that she had drawn!

By this time the strangers had brought their companion, who at intervals reiterated a desire for sleep, as far as the gravel sweep. "Hold up, old 'un," one of them said with a sort of genial roughness, "you're nearly there, and then you can sleep till all's blue." And catching sight of Mrs. Flowerdew in the porch, he managed, while supporting her husband with one hand, to pull off with the other the round hard hat which he wore.

"Sorry ma'am," he said with a comfortable smile. He, Craggs, was the landlord of a small public house not many streets away, and he knew Mrs. Flowerdew by sight. "Sorry, ma'am, but your gentleman's a bit done up like."

"Archie!" cried Eva, as if they two were alone.

For the moment, in the tumult of her thoughts, she had forgotten his supporters. "Oh Archie!"

"Damn you," said her husband pleasantly. He was helplessly drunk, too drunk to know what he was saying. "Want to go 'sleep," he murmured.

"If we might take him up to his room?" said the little publican. He had known for some time that the schoolmaster was fond of his glass, and he thought Mrs. Flowerdew's manifest distress rather foolish. She must have known that he drank.

Eva stepped back. "How did it happen?" she asked, and Craggs paused to explain.

"Well, you see, it was this way," he said, propping Flowerdew against his shoulder. "Our side won, won easy, simply walked over them other chaps, and he'd been liquoring a bit as it was. When he come to see how things was going, well, there was no holding of him. Some is like that. They go steady for a bit, and then all of a sudden they drink theirselves blind."

"But my husband hasn't taken anything for months, he gave it up last—last October."

A slow grin crept over the fat red face, curling up the long lips and twinkling in the little eyes. So he had kept it dark!

"Told you that, did he, ma'am? Well, I never!" He reflected, hitching Flowerdew into a more stable position, and finally shook his head. "A drop now and again's good for a chap," he said at last, "but he ought to know when he's had enough. I've 'ad

experience, and I should say as your good gentleman has been on the drink for some time and that this is the finish. Eh Wilson?" and he looked across at his friend.

"Seems like it," assented Wilson, who, having been a groom for many years, had learnt to be chary of his words. He stood in this strange hall as he would have in his master's, his eyes straight before him, his hands at his side. He was an excellent servant.

Mrs. Flowerdew had not time to think. She leant towards her husband, speaking very distinctly and authoritatively. "Try and walk upstairs, Archie," she said.

Archie opened his eyes. "Tired!" he said. "Long way to the field. Hot sun."

"I really don't think as he can do it, ma'am," interposed Craggs, "but if you was just to go before and shew us the way we'd make nothing of carrying him, me and Wilson."

"Oh, I don't like to trouble you."

"No trouble ma'am," said the polite Wilson.

Flowerdew was laid on the sofa at the foot of the big double bed in his wife's room, and after she had tipped and dismissed the two men, Eva turned to her unhappy mother.

"Well, it has happened," she said, and Mrs. Smart knew that consciously or unconsciously the girl had been expecting something of the sort. The knowledge of what her child had been silently en-

during swept over her and she would have folded the girl in a motherly embrace. But Eva shook her head. "I couldn't stand it," she said, and then looked at her mother wistfully. "Oh, it would be heavenly just to give in and cry about it," she said, "but I mustn't—not yet. You see, everything depends upon me."

Though her face was haggard with anxiety, she looked very young, and Mrs. Smart's heart ached for her. To stand aside, to watch a child suffer and to be unable to help, can anything bring home to the middle-aged more certainly the fact that they have no part in the present? Their work is done, and whether or no their strength is gone from them, they have only to fold their hands and wait for the inevitable.

"I—I shall not go home till the last train to-night," Mrs. Smart said, in the vague hope that presently she might be of some use.

"I shall like to feel that you are here," Eva said, rewarding her, "and after all—yes, in spite of everything, I—I'm glad you know." She went into the room where her husband lay and shut the door upon herself and him.

And Mrs. Smart was left alone—outside.

CHAPTER XVI

An hour or so later that afternoon, a sharp ring at the front door roused Eva out of the stupor of shame, disillusionment and grief into which she had fallen. For a moment she thought of denying herself. She could not face the pity, the condemnation, the pharasaical glance, the curiosity. She had been sitting by the window, her unseeing eyes upon the leafless beech; and though her lids were red, it was with the tears which had not fallen. There is a depth of depression, a blackness of outlook, that robs the soul of all vitality, and Eva, her head upon her hand, her figure drooping forward, was experiencing this bitter languor. She did not weep, she did not complain, she hardly suffered; but it seemed to her that the worst had happened, and that she might let go.

When that insistent tinkle sounded through the house she stayed where she was. Nothing that could happen would make matters worse than they already were, nor could anybody rivet for her that golden bowl of her trust which had been broken. She might as well stay on in the quiet and seclusion of her room.

But the caller was not one to be denied, and presently the parlour-maid was knocking at her door.

"Mr. Stilton to see Master."

Mr. Stilton was the father of a present and of a prospective pupil, and at the mention of his name a new fear shot into Eva's heart. She had realised the disgrace, but hardly what the consequence of it would be, and she saw at once that this man's coming portended trouble. It was possible, it was even probable, that he had been at the Football Match; and if so, he would not have had to wait until gossip brought the tale of Flowerdew's misconduct to his ears. And if he knew?

Why, if he knew, he would of course remove his son and send both to some other school; and not only he, but all the fathers who lived in the immediate neighbourhood would take their boys away. An open scandal may eventually be lived down, it cannot be fought; and Eva realised she was face to face not only with disgrace, but also with beggary. The stimulus of a demand upon her, a demand which must be met, was what she had been needing, and she bade the girl shew Mr. Stilton into the drawing-room. Hitherto she had felt as if her life were in ruins about her feet, now she was as one strenuously holding on to what was hers in spite of wind and weather.

Mr. Henry Stilton was a well-to-do merchant with a sense of duty, and it was that which had brought him to Morton House on his way home from the football field. Generally an easy man, he had been on friendly terms with his son's school-

master, and had been genuinely shocked to see Flowerdew unmistakably the worse for drink. Stilton had not that fellow-feeling for a fellow-sinner which makes men more tolerant to men than women are to women, for he prided himself on his abstemiousness; and his dismay at the sight of a lurching, incoherent Flowerdew was more than merely tinctured with indignation. What was the fellow thinking about? Did he imagine that men like himself would send their sons to be educated by anyone with so little decency and sense of what was fitting? Drunk on the football field! He would certainly take his boy away; in fact, the sooner he saw Flowerdew on the subject the better, and there is no time like the present.

When Eva entered the long, low drawing-room, with its panelled walls and definite colouring, she found her antagonist posed on the Turkey rug before the fire. From his face she gathered at once that she was the last person he had expected to see, and that was encouraging. Mr. Stilton, having a chivalrous contempt for women, disliked approaching them on any but the domestic side, and having called to speak with Flowerdew, was annoyed at having to meet the man's young wife. He drew his heavy black brows together into a knot over his prominent nose. "I wanted to see your husband," he began ungraciously.

Eva took her bull by the horns. "I know," she said, looking him straight in the face, "but he is

not in a condition to see you." She pulled a chair forward for herself and motioned him to another, but Mr. Stilton was careful to choose his own, for it would not do to be too comfortable. "And I know," continued Eva steadily, "that you have come to take Harry away and to say that Tom shall not come to us after Easter, as arranged." She was sitting where the light could fall sideways upon her face, and its anxiety and distress were only too apparent. The man who was facing her, and who at bottom was not more hard than the rest of us, began to look as uncomfortable as the chair he had chosen. He wished, now that it was too late, that he had not come, that he had written. Why should he have allowed his righteous indignation to get the better of him, to wing his middle-aged feet and bring him out on such an errand?

"And as soon as you are gone," continued Eva, "Mr. Gilbert Smith will come, and then Dr. Ackroyd, and then the Pennimans—oh, and all the others."

"Well, but you know," expostulated Stilton in his jerky manner, "it's the sort of thing nobody could stand. Think of the publicity of it—why, it will be all over the place!" He warmed to his work. "And a schoolmaster is like a clergyman, he's different from other men, he is expected to set an example. One must think of the children."

"I know," said Mrs. Flowerdew simply. "I have a child."

For a moment Stilton saw what his action and that of the other men who would withdraw their boys from the care of this undeserving schoolmaster must entail upon her and her child. But the vision was one he did not wish to contemplate.

"My dear young lady," he said, touched a little in spite of that militant virtue of his, "if it wasn't that it might happen again, any day, to-morrow! I'm sorry about it, no one could be more so. I should never have thought it of your husband, so clever, and the boy getting on so well, too; we were perfectly satisfied, Mrs. Stilton and I." He hesitated, and then began to coat his pill with sugar. "We all know how kind you've been to the boys, quite motherly; in fact, it distresses me to think I am putting you about in any way, and Mrs. Stilton will feel the same."

It was even possible that his comfortable helpmate might think he had acted rashly. She liked Mrs. Flowerdew, and being the mother of many little children, her heart had been kept large as well as warm. But her husband would do at any cost what he conceived to be his duty, and his hostess, seeing this, realised that if she wished to turn the interview to good account, she must meet him with a commonsense equal to his own. She leant forward in her chair.

"Mr. Stilton," she said earnestly, "of course you want to do what is best for your boys, but I think you also want to be kind to us—to me—and

I see a way in which you can give us a chance. I see—you have shewn me—that after what has happened, my husband cannot hope to remain here." Mr. Stilton gave a sigh of relief. What a sensible young woman. He need no longer dread his next interview with his wife.

"Well, hardly," he said.

"But we might sell the school to somebody else, and so not lose all the money we have put into it. You say yourself it is a good school." She thought bitterly that it was so because Archie was a fine teacher and organiser.

"Yes," said Stilton, "I couldn't ask for a better. It's thoroughly up to date."

"If," pursued Mrs. Flowerdew, "you and all the others take your children away, we shall not be able to sell the school." She lifted her shoulders expressively. "Of course not—who would buy? But if you were willing to leave them with whoever comes in our place," her voice faltered for a moment, "to leave them until you had given him a fair trial, it would make all the difference to us, all the difference in the world."

In talking it over afterwards with his wife, Mr. Stilton gave Eva her fair meed of admiration. "The spunky little woman," he said, "she quite got round me." At the time, however, he kept his admiration within bounds, and only shifted from his carved German chair to one which his hostess had covered and padded with her own capable hands.

"There's something in what you say," he remarked after a pause of some duration, during which he had carefully considered her proposition. If it did not militate against either his boys' prospects or his own conscience, he would be glad to oblige her, and this chair was certainly more comfortable than the other had been. He leant back, his mind as well as his body relaxing. "Well," he said, "I'll see what the other men say—it's our bridge evening to-night, and the Pennimans won't be more than a step out of my way." Which, being interpreted, meant that as the Pennimans did not play cards, he would call on them and beg them to hold their hands, while as far as Dr. Ackroyd and Mr. Gilbert Smith and the others were concerned, he would see them that evening and they could then talk it over. A little briskness came into his manner, for it must be admitted that Mr. Stilton liked to play a part in the drama of life, and he could be, because of that very weakness, an efficient friend. "Well then, Mrs. Flowerdew," he said, getting up again, "I may take it from you that after Easter the school will be in different hands?"

"You may take it from me," said poor Eva, with the recollection of all their labour and self-denial in her mind. How proud they had been of it, their own school, how willing to work for it, how eagerly they had discussed every change, every improvement! While it was safely theirs it had seemed a burden; now that it must be given up, she knew it

for a treasure. She had murmured against it to her mother, now she saw it as a mine which they had discovered, but out of which other men were to lift the gold.

Mr. Stilton offered her his broad, rather damp hand. "I am sure," he said paternally, "that we shall all of us be glad to meet you in any way that we can." And he went away with a little glow at his heart. He was doing a kind action, he would make others join with him, and, last but not least, he knew that he would have won the approval of his stout and comfortable wife. He went home, thinking all the way of that little pat upon the back which he had earned and was about to receive.

After she had seen him out, Eva went in search of her mother. There was so much to think of, so much to be done, that she almost wished Mrs. Smart had gone back to Eastham; but when she found her, sitting on a cane chair in her bedroom, with those capable hands miserably idle in her lap, she wished, not that she had gone back, but that she had never come. Why should her mother be involved in this trouble, which was not her trouble, but which, because she knew of it, must so sadly affect her pleasant, everyday complacency. Eva was not more self-absorbed than the majority of young people, and she was able to spare a thought from her own worries to this grief of her mother's, the root of which lay in her inability to help. As time had passed and the school had grown more prosperous, Mrs. Smart

had allowed herself to take a little pride in Eva's position. She was not a pretentious woman, but it was pleasant to feel that the girl had done well for herself; and that everything, the school and the baby and the young husband, were satisfactory. She had gone about her daily work with the feeling that Eva at least had builded her house of life above the reach of misfortune's tides, and when she thought of her she had smiled.

The interview with Mr. Stilton had been rather a strain upon nerves already jangled, and Eva sank into the basket chair by Mrs. Smart's window as if she never meant to leave it again. "Oh Mother!" she said. The time had come to make confession, to admit all that that mother guessed, and to tell her the point to which she had been forced by her visitor of that afternoon.

When she had finished, the two unhappy women sat staring before them, but Eva's cold hand was clasped in her mother's, and Mrs. Smart felt that she was no longer—outside!

"If I had only taken your advice in the beginning," sighed Eva. Her faith in her young husband had been of rainbow dust, once it had spanned the heavens, now it was dissolved in tears. "Oh that unlucky, that unlucky money."

"Unlucky?" queried Mrs. Smart, a startled note in her voice.

"I could almost wish," said the girl despondently, "that Granny had not left it you."

And Mrs. Smart remembered, what during the last two years she had almost forgotten, that it had not been her mother's, that it was treasure trove, all that remained to her of the jewels which she had found. "Finding is keeping," Mrs. Smart had told herself and she murmured it again, but to a heart grown suddenly uneasy.

"But why, Eva?"

"I suppose it's silly to say so, but it really seems as if all the trouble had sprung from it. If we couldn't have had the two thousand pounds, we must have begun in a small way, and then Archie could not have afforded the—the luxuries which have brought us to this. There is a saying about being 'too big for your boots' and I'm afraid it applies to us."

"But," said Mrs. Smart anxiously, "your husband was used to having things very nice. He had been to college you know, and had been a master in big schools."

"His father was a bank manager Mother, he told me so; and if he hadn't taken all those scholarships he would never have gone to Oxford. It was travelling with Lord Albert Gaveston that gave him his large ideas."

Mrs. Smart sighed, admitting the truth of her daughter's words. "Well, well," she said, "perhaps it wasn't wholly on Archie's account that I let you have the money."

"I thought not," said Eva.

"I did want you to have a nice home and a good position."

"Ah Mother dear, yes, and so you played Providence." She shook her head. "It doesn't seem to be allowed does it? One has to be one's own Providence. It's a queer thing, but one is not punished for one's sins half as much as one is for one's errors of judgment. Perhaps the unwritten law 'Don't be foolish' is more important than all the other commandments put together. I wonder."

But Mrs. Smart never wondered. "An error of judgment," she said thoughtfully, "yes, perhaps it was."

"And," continued Eva, harping upon a previous thought, "if Granny had not left you that unlucky money, it was an error that could not have been committed."

"No," said her mother rather dismally. Had the money really brought ill-luck? But how absurd! She had had a perfect right to it. She had found it in her own house, on her own mantel-shelf. Ill-gotten gains? What nonsense! She had a sturdy faith in her own righteousness and Eva's remarks, if they disturbed it for a moment, could not do more than that. "I meant well," she said, and took comfort from the thought.

"It does not seem to me," said the daughter, "that intentions count."

Mrs. Smart turned a shocked face upon her. "Oh Eva," she said, "intentions are everything." She

had taken the jewels in order to help her children on in the world. She had been entirely well-meaning—but there, it was all nonsense! Eva was worried and did not know what she was saying. But though she pooh-poohed the idea she was at once too superstitious and too careful to forget it. A stone had been dropped into the clear shallows of her mind, a stone of a different colour to the surrounding sand and on her way home that evening she thought of it more than once.

CHAPTER XVII

THE first awakening of a man after he has irretrievably disgraced himself, his realisation of the ruin which by weakness or deliberate wrong-doing he has brought upon himself and his family is of a sufficient poignancy. When Archibald Flowerdew woke unrefreshed out of the heavy sleep in which he had lain all night, it was yet early and he was only conscious of a throbbing in his head. Light, the dim light of a new day, was filtering through the green venetians and though he had no recollection of how he had got there, he was in his bed. He was very uncomfortable, his tongue was dry, his head ached and he felt more than a little sick. Turning, he saw Eva's dark head on the adjacent pillow and became aware that she was lying withdrawn as far as possible from him. His elbow touched her slightly and at once she shrank away, but she did not speak. He had made the movement tentatively and her response disturbed him. What was the matter? What had he done? For a minute or two he lay wondering and then little by little he began to remember. He had gone to the football match on the preceding afternoon and he had gone primed. The gardener had that morning brought him a fresh bottle of whiskey and before

he went out he had taken some, not so very much, but perhaps rather more than was wise. His fellow townsmen's victory had come as a surprise to him, a pleasant surprise. Someone, Dr. Ackroyd he thought, had suggested a drink, and some other man another. He had not understood why they should have given him a feeling of worry and confusion, and in order to clear his head he had ordered himself a third and that was all that he remembered. How and when he had reached home he had not the faintest recollection, but he hoped for the best. He had always prided himself on the way he carried his liquor, surely his power to seem had not deserted him. Stifling a groan of discomfort he turned on his side and Eva, who had had very little sleep, lifted her ruffled head from the pillow and perceiving that he was awake, sat up.

Archie had married a sweet and affectionate girl. To say that her outlook was sane, that she believed as she had been taught and preferred well-ordered ways to breaking out a path for herself may make her seem commonplace, perhaps even a little priggish. But it is curious how many good young creatures are either priggish or sentimental, and what sharp speeches old Dame Nature has to fling at their foolish erect young heads before they can be brought to exchange their booklore for her teachings. Eva was as youthfully intolerant as other girls of her age, and had as many cut and dried theories as to what she would do if this, that, or the other

thing happened; and on this occasion she had had long hours in which to think over the irrevocable. It is not perhaps surprising that her thinking had by no means inclined her to mercy.

Pushing up her pillow she leant against it, and described to the poor sinner who lay silent at her side, how and in what condition he had returned to her on the preceding day. As he did not speak she hesitated for a moment and then went on to tell him of Mr. Stilton's visit and what she had promised. Being angry she used as few words as possible, but spoke in a dry, cold fashion which showed her husband how far apart they now stood.

And as Archie listened, shame and remorse like the flowing tide rose and overwhelmed him. If she had known, the ice which was forming in her warm blood must have melted again. But he could not speak, could not tell her and she did not see.

"You promised that the school should change hands?" he said when she paused.

"It was our only chance." She had made the arrangements and she could not tell from his voice whether he were grateful or annoyed.

"Ah! Well, I must think things over. I shall not get up just yet."

Eva looked at him coldly. He could not rise because after the indulgence of the preceding day, he was probably feeling ill. "It is fortunate," she said, "that Easter falls late this year. It will give us time."

Archie's face was bitter. "Oh, very fortunate," he said. Does a woman ever know what his work is to a man? Can she realise his pride in it, his love for it, his interest in all concerning it? It is doubtful whether Archie would have felt the death of his son more than the loss of his school. And Eva could speak of it calmly, could estimate their chance of selling, could look eagerly past that selling to the after time, the time when it would be no longer his. He said no more and presently she got up and left him. She had her own troubles, but her pride forbade her to speak of them, led her out instead to face them.

For Eva was going to church. Knowing that she and her husband were the talk of their little world, she would yet dress as usual, though a little more carefully, take her prayer book and hymnal, and walk at the usual time through the streets. She would sit through the service in her appointed place and afterwards she would greet her neighbours, would smile and chat. As she turned in at her own gate the stereotyped smile still on her lips, she thought confusedly that if the ordeal by fire had been still in use she must have qualified for a triumphant passing of it. But her bravery won her little honour. The world does not love a stoic, and the general opinion was that Mrs. Flowerdew would have shown a finer appreciation of the position if she had stayed at home. "She should have been ashamed to show her face," remarked Milly,

Ackroyd, the doctor's wife, to a group of women who were standing by the lych-gate of the church.

"Rather lacking in refinement," murmured Mrs. Gilbert Smith, "but then, who was she?"

Mrs. Stilton stopped in passing. "I don't know, but she's a brave girl. I'm as sorry about it as ever I can be," and she went on up the road.

And Mrs. Ackroyd, who thought Mrs. Gilbert Smith affected, suddenly veered round. After all the Stiltons were patients while the Gilbert Smiths had gone to a new man. "She was a Miss Smart," she said maliciously. "Her grandfather was Sir Jocelyn Smart of Smarden Priory."

"Oh, did she tell you so?" murmured the other languidly.

"No, it's in Burke." She had taken the trouble to look it up. She always maintained that you could not know too much about your neighbours.

"Really," she glanced after Eva's tall figure as it went down the road, "she doesn't look it, indeed her coming to church this morning struck me as in very bad taste. Mrs. Stilton called it brave and I may be wrong of course, but brave is hardly the word I should have used."

Archie Flowerdew had what meals he ate that day brought to his room, and when Eva after her various duties as housewife, mother and matron had been performed, went upstairs, she found him sitting rather drearily at one end of the sofa. She had been at concert pitch all day, supported in her

rôle by that bitter pride of hers and she now seated herself at the other end of the sofa. "Well?" said she, and her voice was as bright as sunshine on a wintry day.

But she was speaking to a broken man. Archie had been humiliated beyond endurance, both by the publicity of his disgrace and by the fact that it had been he, Archibald Flowerdew, the man that had held his head so fastidiously high, so much higher than his fellow-men, who was come down to this. He had been so clever, so successful, and yet it was he who had done this thing, who had let a vice creep insidiously upon him until it had got the mastery. He hated and loathed it. He hated and loathed himself, but when Eva's voice broke in upon his miserable thoughts, it brought with it a spark of hope, for he saw at last what he must do. He had been shamed before his wife and now he was shamed before the world, if he were ever to hold up his head again he must wipe away that shame. For desperate ailments desperate remedies.

Seeing that he did not answer Eva put her query in another form.

"Have you made up your mind?" she said. "You have had the day to think it over and I must know what you are going to do."

The man looked down at his hands, lying loosely clasped between his knees. "I am going away," he said dully. "As soon as the school is sold I am going away."

"I suppose we—we shall all be going away." If he had loved his business, she had loved the walls which made it home. With what economy and forethought they had lined the nest, the nest to which little Jocelyn had come, to which in due time others might have come, and now it would be taken from them. A wave of bitterness flooded Eva's heart.

"Yes," he said. "But I am going—by myself."

The girl did not grasp his meaning. "By yourself?" she echoed.

"You did your best for me, but it was no good. Somehow the mere fact that I had promised you, was against me. I see that if a man would get to any place he must fight his way there by himself." He turned and looked across at her and she saw the despondency which he was not attempting to conceal. "I have been thinking and thinking and it seems to me that I must go away—by myself—and fight. If—if I win I shall come back to you."

He had taken for granted that her anger and coldness were for the moment and that below them lay her unchangeable affection, and Eva could not but respond to his fine knowledge of her. Her disappointment seemed suddenly a small and petty thing. Before his tragedy of a man's soul what was her disillusionment, the loss of their position, the selling of their home? Home for her would be wherever this man was, a palace, a hovel, any space under the broad arch of heaven, for she was one of those simple women to whom marriage is union, a union

which nothing, not Death nor anything in life, can dissolve.

"If you win?" she murmured blankly and now she sat apart from him because she did not dare to come any nearer. What were her loyalty, her desire to comfort, her tender yearning in the face of such a grief as his? Things so inadequate, that she could not proffer them.

"If I win," he said and sank back into his unhappy thoughts.

The afternoon was waning and it had begun to rain. Eva had walked to church in a glory of windy light, but now the sun was gone in, the breeze had died away and the grey rain was blurring all the landscape.

> Like stealthy footsteps in the grass,
> Rustling the rain did fall—

and Eva listened to it, at first blankly as one for whom all decisions have been made, but after a time with growing perturbation. The calm of despair had fallen upon her husband, but hers was a more vital nature, and though she would not attempt to alter or even modify his resolution, she began to see what it must mean to her. His figure loomed heroic through the mists of sentiment. He would go out and redeem his manhood or he would go under; but meanwhile she and little Jocelyn and—and that other who was coming, they would not

know, they would be waiting and listening and hoping and it would be, oh, it would be unbearable!

But she did not say so. She sat on, her figure a little hunched together, in the attitude people sink into when their courage is at a low ebb, for if—if he never came back?

She must give him every inducement to win and she did not see that in so doing she would make the tragedy of his failure, if failure it were to be, more terrible.

"Archie," she murmured softly, "I told you that perhaps——"

The man had been sitting among his ruined hopes, but her voice calling to him brought him out from among them. In this very room not so many weeks ago she had whispered to him a hope and something in her tones reminded him of it.

"Yes," he said, and turned towards her, full of a new-born eagerness, for Archie was naturally a father and even in such an hour her news would give him joy.

"I—I was right," she said shyly. "It will be in October, in October again," for Jocelyn had come to them in the month of pheasants.

He crossed the space of sofa that had divided them. "Oh, my dear girl, my dear girl," he murmured and now she was in his arms.

"You are glad, Archie?"

But she had no doubts. He loved children, he

would like to have as many as she could give him, he would be proud of her and grateful to her every time that she made him a father.

"Glad?" he cried, and then remembered. "And I must leave you, you and my—my children. Oh God!" He paused and his broken look returned. "Eva, you have given just the little extra turn to the screw."

But she did not understand. She thought she had now made it certain that he would return, and she told him so.

He looked at her queerly. When a man goes down into the depths he brings a strange and bitter knowledge back with him. "You do not know," he whispered huskily, "a man can do without everything that he has, everything that he loves, except his vice."

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Flowerdew was fortunate in that his agent was able to find him a purchaser ready to buy and anxious to enter into possession. He did not receive what he had paid for the school, but that he had scarcely expected and the sum paid, was more than enough to support his wife in comfort for a time.

"But what will you do?" she asked when he explained the monetary arrangements he had made, and spoke of opening a banking account for her.

"I? Oh I shall work," he answered lightly and she realised with the pain that comes to every woman when the man whom she has cherished is about to face privation, that he meant poverty to be one of the factors of his new life.

"But you are not strong," she urged.

He looked at her gravely. "Oh, yes," he said, "I am strong enough. I did not tell you the truth," and he smiled at her, the old whimsical smile. "Dear, you have lots of commonsense, but you are not very clever, you ought to have seen through me long ago."

"Oh but Archie, I trusted you."

"And it is such a mistake that."

"To trust?"

"Yes." He did not often trouble himself to disturb her settled convictions. "Dear, you have plenty of intuition and I fancy you must have been meant to use it. When you do, you will find it a better servant than trust. But now we must really talk business. You will go to your mother?"

"In October but not before."

"Not before?"

"I couldn't, Archie. I couldn't face them all."

"Then where?"

"I could get a room at Oldmeadow Farm. There are several that are never used and I know Tamsin would like to have me. Why should the Eastham people know anything, anything at all?"

"'Why should the other women know so much—' eh? My dear it is a little world, but still you shall do as you like. I thought you would want to be with your mother."

"Ashwater isn't far from Eastham."

"You will take lodgings at the farm?"

"Yes."

"It sounds a good idea."

During that last month Eva's health suffered from the restraint which she put upon herself, for neither by word nor look would she hold him back from the course of action upon which he had resolved. Instead she assumed a cheerfulness she was far from feeling and went about her daily work with pleasant words and a tranquil face. But her heart was very sore. How could she live without

him, how get through the days, how bear the terrible uncertainty? While he lay sleeping by her side at night, and Archie slept well, then and then alone might the tears fall; but through the hours of daylight she must endure and she must smile. Nor would she have had it otherwise. Happiness is a great matter, but to Eva Flowerdew pride was a greater. She could live through their separation if only at the end of it she might be able to feel that in a world of men, he whom she had married, he also was a man.

Meanwhile however, she suffered, losing her pretty contours and the rich damask of her cheeks. But the end comes, even to such situations as hers and Archie's, such long drawn out unhappiness, such dread, such mutual sorrow. They parted on a warm May day when the holm-oaks of the little avenues were growing yellow with young leaves and catkins; and while Eva and little Jocelyn took the train to Ashwater, Archie shaken and almost unmanned by that last silent clinging of his wife, turned his face towards Eastham. Before he slipped away out of the tiny world to which he was known, he must see his sister and commend to her his dear ones. Her husband would not help—and there he wronged Matt Johnson who would not lend upon bad security but who could give—but Mary, Mary had always been his friend! He had not seen much of her since his marriage. At first, new husband and new wife, he and Eva had been ab-

sorbed in each other and afterwards, well afterwards he had hardly liked to go over. Mary had quick eyes, and her disposition was not so trusting as Eva's. He had not wanted Mary to know.

But now she must, and when he saw her kind face with its worn look—for Mary was one of those women who live long lives and yet hardly know what it is to be free from pain, he remembered that she had always understood and made allowances for him.

"You don't know the temptation, Mary," he said, looking round at her charming room with its vista of flower-set garden and green tennis lawn. As far as he could see she had everything that she could need, an adoring husband, clever, vital children, and plenty of money.

"Ah, but don't I?" she said. How blind and self-absorbed he had always been. She had a great deal to be thankful for but the heart knoweth its own bitterness and her bad health, her craving for companionship, for some outlet into the world of books and music and pictures, rose one by one out of the little graves in which she had sought to bury them and confronted her. "Ah, but don't I?" she murmured again.

"How can you?" said her brother, "when you have all this?" and he indicated the books and the photographs of old masters with which she had lined her walls. "When you have no money worries, no——"

"Nerves?" said Mary. "Oh, I know you are absurdly sensitive." She knew because she herself had always taken things too hardly.

"Ah, you understand me," he said comfortably. "And so perhaps you do know how I feel. I am worried about some trifle and a glass makes me easier in my mind and so I take one and then another; and after a time I want it, I feel I must have it, I'm just mad to get it. The craving comes and I hate anyone who would prevent me having it. When it is at its worst I would lie and steal and beg for it, humiliate myself in any way, oh yes."

Mary had her own secrets. "Yes, of course," she said pitifully.

"But you don't know what the craving is," protested Archie. "The damnable strength of it, nobody could know who has not felt it."

His delicate and fragile sister, on her couch beneath the window, wondered if she must tell him; for there had been a time in Mary Johnson's life when she had craved the alcohol which delivered her from an almost constant feeling of debility. But recognising her danger she had recoiled in time. Even so, it had for many a day been uphill work for her feet, and she would never forget, never.

"Uncle Joseph died of it and Great-Uncle Charles," said her brother sombrely.

"Uncle Joseph was one of eight and Great-Uncle Charles the youngest of eleven," she said

slowly. "The others probably felt the craving and fought against it and won through—as you will do. We know that Great-Aunt Dorcas drank when she was a middle-aged woman, for it is one of those family secrets that the whole family knows, but look at her now, a most respectable old lady. The fact is we only hear of those who go under. Those who have made a fight for it, prefer to pose as having been always virtuous."

"You think so?" said Flowerdew, marvelling over the secretiveness of mankind, of those hidden misdemeanours, conquered weaknesses which go about concealed behind spotless garments.

"Oh I? Yes, I—I know it is so."

"At any rate it is a helpful sort of theory."

"What are your plans?" It did not seem as if that confession upon the edge of which she had hesitated, would be necessary. Her poor secret, she might return it to its cupboard and still pose as immaculate.

"I shall go to Bannerman. You remember him? One of the friends I made at Oxford."

"I remember him." The days when Archie had been at Oxford had been the happiest of her life. There was nothing about them that she did not vividly remember.

"He runs a Labour Bureau. Of all things—but he may be useful now."

"You will get him to find you something to do?"

"Yes, I shall own up and take anything he of-

fers, dock-labourer, factory hand, secretary to a society, anything. If he has nothing to give me, well I don't know, I shall see."

"But manual labour, Archie?"

"I have a fancy that it would be good for me to use my muscles; to rise early, to dig, hoe, plant, tire myself out and go dead sleepy to my bed. It would be one way of fighting the enemy. It's just an idea of mine and of course I may be wrong."

Mary did not venture to offer an opinion. She did not believe much in adventitious aids, but she might be mistaken. At any rate he could try them. "And meanwhile what is Eva going to do?"

"She declines to come back here. Mrs. Smart wishes it, but Eva says there are some things a woman cannot do."

"You have always held yourself so aloof from gossip Archie, that you hardly realise its power. You can't imagine the chatter there would be if she were here without you."

"And what does the chatter of such people matter?"

The worn lines in Mrs. Johnson's face deepened a little. "Such people!" That had always been his attitude towards those less clever than himself and in her secret heart it had been hers too. There had been a time when she had hated her wholesome suburban neighbours, used a caustic tongue upon them, made reckless efforts to enlarge her circle. She had been unsuccessful, she had been desperate,

only now because she was growing older and because it was no use kicking against the pricks, was she quiet.

"Ah, be sensible," she said. "Some day you will want to begin again; and then you will be glad that Eva at least has considered peoples' prejudices. Meanwhile, where will she be?"

"She is gone to the little farm which belonged to her grandmother. She went down to-day." His face contracted. It was only an hour or two since he had parted from her, since he had seen that silent agony written on her face.

"Oh Archie, you must come back, you must come back," cried his sister.

"Do you think I don't want to?" he flung out fiercely. "Great heavens, I'm as much in love with her now as on the day I married her, more I think." He described to his sister how the girl had gone through the streets on that Sunday morning, how she had faced Mr. Stilton and turned his righteous indignation to their advantage and Mary listened with a growing admiration. Hitherto she had looked upon her brother's choice as one hardly worthy of him, a good healthy young woman who would bear him children and mind his house, but from whom he must not expect much in the way of companionship.

"How she has developed," she said. "Well I will go over to Ashwater as often as I can. The car Matt has given me will make it easy, and I'll

keep an eye upon them Archie—till—till you come back."

The girl of whom they had been talking stood in need not perhaps of mere kindness, for who can minister to such an one, but of all the courage which she possessed. She had taken up an attitude which it was marvellously difficult to maintain. Archie had left her for a time, as sailors, soldiers and others, are forced to, but he would return. Not even to herself would she admit a doubt of that ultimate return, much less to any of the few with whom she was brought into contact. She bore herself as one content to wait, looking after little Jocelyn and facing the responsibilities of her new life as simply as she had the small daily events of her quiet girlhood. Tamsin was glad to have her, glad of the small extra sum per week which she paid for board and lodging, glad of her help with the big broods and in the vegetable garden.

The little old Cornishwoman was herself none too happy. For her the year had galloped past and she looked forward with mingled feelings to the time when Mrs. Smart should come to take her place; and she should be free to go down to Port Isaac to give Captain Honey his answer. Even now she did not know what to say. She was doing well with the farm, better even than her late mistress had, and it seemed a pity to give it up; while on the other hand this was probably her last chance of matrimony. Tamsin did not believe that any-

body who could find a mate would remain single; and thinking so, she naturally regarded all spinsters as failures. To achieve independence was all very well, but a clever woman could do better than that, she could marry. That was success, and that was what Tamsin the keen farmer, the shrewd woman of business, craved above all other goods. She had success as men see it, but she wanted the success which would appeal to her fellow-woman.

She began the preparations for her fortnight at Port Isaac in some trepidation; and Eva, grown more sympathetic, gave her what assistance she could.

"When 'Ah'm there, 'Ah'll feel more sure as to what Ah do really want," she said. At the July sales she had bought herself a velveteen dress of a rich tobacco brown, and Eva, who had clever fingers, had helped to adapt it to her figure. With a collar of Irish crochet it would look very well and Mrs. Flowerdew as she had ripped and pinned had told her so. But Tamsin was not altogether pleased. "Jan Honey did always say as he liked quiet dressing and this be quiet," she said dubiously, "but red 'ud ha' suited me better."

"Oh no, Tamsin."

"Well mysen Ah'm none so fond o' quiet dowdy things, but Ah will say as this fare soft," and she smoothed the brown folds with a horny finger. "'Tes good of 'ee Miss Eva to be bothering over a oal body, when 'ee've troubles enough of your own."

"Helps me to forget them, Tamsin."

"Aw 'ee've a stout heart. Look, there do be postman coming up the road. Wonder if that's a letter from Miss Minty, saying her can come o' Saturday week?"

"I'll go and see. You'll do now Tamsin, take off the dress and I'll set to work on it this evening."

Eva went carefully down the narrow stairs. She never forgot that her grandmother had slipped on the oilcloth at the head of them, and she was anxious not to endanger her hope of motherhood. When Archie came back she hoped to have a new little Eva to show him, a tiny epitome of her dark, rosy, brown-eyed self; but if her dreams were to materialise, she must be careful, oh very careful, and the stairs were at all times awkward, so steep and with such a sharp turn.

The postman was at the gate when she reached it and the letter that he offered her proved to be in her mother's handwriting, but its contents were hardly what she had expected. Mrs. Smart hoped to come over on Saturday week, but Tamsin was not to build upon her doing so, for something had happened which might alter her plans. It had to do with Willy, but she did not wish to discuss it in a letter. Could Eva come for the day and bring Jocelyn? She was much upset, and uncertain what to do for the best; but if Eva came they could talk it over.

Upstairs Tamsin was laying the brown velveteen

carefully away in its cardboard box. In the stillness of the summer evening Eva could hear the rustling of the tissue paper, as she laid it between the soft folds. She stood for a moment with her elbows on the top rail of the little green gate, a fresh anxiety tugging at her heart. What did her mother mean? Of course she would go over, but what, what had Willy been doing?

CHAPTER XIX

Colonel Smart had long since found comfortable quarters for himself in Jermyn Street, but his town life by no means absorbed him. At sixty he was still energetic, still eager, still at a moment's notice ready to pack a bag and follow the beckoning finger of a fresh interest. His life was as full as he could wish, his friends as numerous, his health as good, and down at Eastham in a commonplace house with a window on each side of the front door and three in a row above, were people for whom he cared as much as he could for anybody. They remained and he came and went as pleased him, for him a most satisfactory, indeed an ideal state of affairs.

One July day, having found London entertainments very hot, and London unreality very tiring, he had wired to his sister-in-law that he proposed to come down that evening in time for dinner, and if she could have him, would stay a day or two before going north. An old friend who owned some islands off the coast of Scotland had invited him to his bachelor castle and Colonel Smart thought that after four months of the metropolis sea-breezes would be refreshing.

Minty had of course perceived that her brother-

in-law looked upon The Laurels rather than his chambers as home, and she was willing, even pleased that he should. The feeling that she could ask his advice but need not take it, that she had a man upon whose arm she could lean, while at the same time she retained her freedom, gave her a sense of security and companionship. She was no longer entirely responsible, and yet she was at liberty to do as she liked. When she received his wire with its prepaid reply, she smiled at his masculine extravagance, and at once set about improving and enlarging the evening meal. He must have a curry! Long ago, when home on leave, he had taught her how to make one, and since then had averred contentedly that hers always made him fancy himself back in India. And there must be salad with the roast chicken! She would go out and choose the ingredients herself; if anyone knew how to choose a salad it was she.

Her welcome of him if a silent one, took a form which he could appreciate, for the Colonel after one of Minty's dinners was apt to say he understood why men who married their cooks, so seldom regretted it.

The meal to which the three presently sat down in the terra-cotta dining-room was simple, nourishing and beautifully cooked; but Mrs. Smart saw with dismay that the Colonel and the Colonel only, appreciated it. For some months Willy had seemed pre-occupied and anxious, but to-night he hardly heard her when she spoke, while it was evident that

what food he took and it was very little, was swallowed mechanically. Her excellent dinner! As course succeeded course, Mrs. Smart's anxiety grew. What could be the matter with the boy? After his long day in the city, he should be ready for his food, the good wholesome food which she had provided. He might have been forgiven if it had been only the curry which he passed, curries were queer and she did not know that she cared about them, but the chicken, the young and tender chicken! She had given him the liver-wing, remembering that he preferred it to any other part, and he had eaten—was it four mouthfuls or only three? What could have happened? Hitherto a visit from his uncle had been more than enough to draw him out of any pre-occupation, but to-night he sat mute and dull, his curious eyes more opaque than usual and their lids heavy.

Colonel Smart found his surroundings restful. The spicy scent of geraniums came through the open window; and in the precise front garden their ordered ranks rose behind the blue lobelia of the border. The old soldier had eaten well and was at his ease, he could talk or not talk as liked him best; and Minty would listen, would comment, and would go on with whatever her hand had found to do. The atmosphere was peaceful and he felt that when he grew old and consequently tired, he would ask nothing better than to spend his last days under his sister-in-law's roof. He looked across at her whole-

some face, wondering whether she would agree, whether he could be sure of this asylum.

"Ah Minty," he said, "you don't know how difficult it is for me, once I am here, to pack my trunks and depart. You make me so comfortable."

His sister-in-law smiled at him, her warm and motherly smile. "Why depart?" said she.

"That is what it will come to," he returned. "This place is idyllic, the very home of peace."

His nephew caught the last word. "Peace! Who wants it?" he said, and Mrs. Smart noticed that his voice had a harsh quality which was new to her.

"Not the young," allowed Colonel Smart, and from thinking of his latter end, returned to those gay and gallant days when an asylum for his old age was the last thing of which he thought. Ah, the good years, how intensely he had lived! Oh the work and the play, the love and the money-getting, and all that goes to the making of a life!

Mrs. Smart had risen from the table and was putting the cruets away in the sideboard, while the servant cleared. When the Colonel was with them she spent her evenings in the drawing-room and he was free to join her or not as he chose. As she went towards the door, Willy stopped her with a gesture and she came back to him. "What is it, dearie?"

"Oh, it's the end," he said miserably, "I've got to tell you, so I may as well get it over."

The Colonel made as if to rise and go, but the young man stopped him. "You'll have to know," he said.

Mrs. Smart slipped back onto the chair she had been occupying, a sick feeling of apprehension at her heart. Had Willy quarrelled with his partner? Was he tired of being a stockbroker? For months she had been secretly dreading some outbreak on his part; and now, had it come?

"I——" began Willy, hesitating over his explanation. "I've lost the money that you gave me Mother, Granny's money."

Mrs. Smart's spirits rose. Was that all? He had been speculating and had been unfortunate. Well, well, she could still help him, start him afresh.

A little bead of perspiration formed itself between Willy's dark straight brows. "But that isn't all," he said slowly, conscious of his uncle's steady regard and of the renewed apprehension in his mother's face. "We aren't allowed to speculate and I would; I saw a splendid opportunity at least I thought it was splendid——"

"That was not the first time," interposed the Colonel.

"Oh no, but before that I had only dabbled, this time I—I plunged."

"But if it isn't allowed?"

Willy flicked a crumb off the woolly surface of the table-cloth and his voice sank. "I—I invented a bogus client."

"Explain!" said his uncle, in a voice that had grown serious and masterful, the voice of a colonel addressing some young officer who is in fault.

"I chose a name out of the Directory and gave the address of a small paper shop and I speculated for this Mr. Pybus. Addison did not suspect, at least not then. You see we wrote to the address given and I—and I went to the shop for the letters and replied as—as Pybus. At first things went up and there was a cheque for me—for Pybus, and I thought it was a sure thing and that I'd more than double my capital. But I had miscalculated and the things dropped all of a sudden and my two thousand was gone."

"Well?" Colonel Smart was no longer the mere visitor. He had thrust his feet into those shoes which his brother had left empty.

"Addison had not been as blind as I thought. He had had inquiries made and this morning he told me it was all up, that he had found me out and —and that he had closed the account."

"And that means?"

"The end of my career as a stockbroker."

"You are disgraced?"

Willy nodded unhappily. "I shall be posted."

Mrs. Smart struck in at that. "Oh William, no! Surely we can do something? There is money. I have never spent the whole of my income."

"What made you do it?" asked the Colonel. He must get to the bottom of the matter before he could

take measures, before he could even pronounce upon it.

Willy considered. "I so wanted to make money," he said at last, "to make it quickly. I hate the city and the talk and the dirt, and I wanted to get away. I—oh, you must know!" and he looked at his uncle appealingly. If anyone understood it would be this man who himself had gone hither and thither about the earth, who had seen strange things and done them. "I kept thinking of all the other places, they came between me and my work and I couldn't get up any interest in it. All I thought of, was how to get away. Our offices are in a narrow street, where not a bit of sky is visible and where the smuts come in at the windows in their thousands, and Addison said we were lucky to get them—the offices. Lucky! I couldn't see it. I thought of the sunshine and the green grass and the places where a man can live a man's life and be clean."

"But he must take a pair of clean hands with him," said the Colonel, and a rush of dull red suffused his nephew's skin.

"I always thought you were too young to have an office of your own," Mrs. Smart said. Disaster had led her back to a discarded opinion. "Addison is a dull and steady young man who would be sure to get on, but you are different."

"What arrangements have you made?" asked the Colonel.

"I am to meet my partner and his father to-

morrow morning. They do not want to be hard on me, but of course the partnership will have to be dissolved and Addison is afraid he will have to bring the matter before the committee. The firm cannot be allowed to suffer for my misdeeds."

"Oh, but surely, surely it can be hushed up." The god of Mrs. Smart's class was respectability, and the other worshippers must not know that her son was outcast from their shrine. "If I find the money——"

"Hushed up!" said the Colonel bitterly. "That any action of Willy's should need hushing up!"

Willy held his peace, he had admitted his guilt, he had even explained it and the strain of the last few weeks was now beginning to make itself felt. The thing was done. He was found out and he wondered dully why he had been so foolish as to go beyond the regulations. He felt extraordinarily tired and it did not seem to matter what was done to him. "I must go up in the morning," he said, and remembered it would be the last time he would need to go. Whatever the reason of his freedom, he was glad to be free.

"I will go with you," said his uncle, "and we must do the best we can."

"Thank you, sir."

The Colonel cleared his throat. "But I must own that I am disappointed in you, you have not been playing a straight game. By the Lord Harry, sir, it—it wasn't honest! I cannot understand how

it was possible, *possible* for you to have done such a thing."

Mrs. Smart looked up quickly, making as if she would speak. She had remembered her mother's words:—"There's a something about the shape of your head, Willy has it too, that reminds me of your father." Willy had inherited from her father that carelessness in money matters which had been his ruin, but she? What had she done? Eva had said that the money from her trove was unlucky, but why? Could it be that findings were not necessarily keepings?

Conviction of sin to Minty Smart, meant a feeling on her part that the powers above, justifiably or not, were displeased with her. She now wondered if by any possibility they had not been willing that she should keep the jewels. They had been her jewels, found on her mantel-shelf, belonging to no ostensible person, as much a discovery on her part as the finding of gold on No Man's Land! But no, after all, it had not been quite the same. Though she had been ignorant of their owner's name the jewels had belonged to somebody, to some other woman. Could it be that the powers watching over that other woman as well as over herself, had weighed her action in the great balances and found it wanting? And had Eva, speaking carelessly, uttered a truth? Had the jewels, having been wrongfully acquired, been allowed by Omniscience to bring

misfortune in their train? The proceeds of their sale had been divided unequally between her children and first Eva and now Willy had suffered. Was it, as a consequence? Mrs. Smart shrewd though she was, could hardly be called a student of character. She did not see that her son and son-in-law's misfortunes were the outcome of their natures, of inherent qualities which the keeping of the jewels could not in any way have affected. No, trouble had come, to her mind unaccountable trouble, and she looked about her for the possible cause and looking, found it in her trove—the jewels were unlucky!

But she had meant well! She had thought herself very wise and clever, for by keeping the little package she had been enabled to dower her daughter and start her son in business. She had congratulated herself on her smartness in outwitting the burglar and disposing of the stones; but that what she was doing had a moral aspect had never even occurred to her. She now saw that she had had no more right to keep the stones than the burglar had. Her quickened conscience assured her that her action was what the Rev. J. J. Jorrocks, speaking from the pulpit, would have termed dishonest. The five thousand pounds was money come by dishonestly and she, Araminta Smart, had been guilty of a dishonest deed! She wondered in a troubled fashion why this had not occurred to her sooner.

Years had come and gone since she had disposed of the jewels, but this was the first time that she had, ever so faintly, regretted what she had done.

And Willy? His mother felt that Willy had probably been as well-meaning as she, that it had not occurred to him until too late that what he was doing was dishonourable. He would think, if he thought at all, that the end,—that doubling of his capital, justified the means.

Colonel Smart could not understand how it had been possible for Willy to have done such a thing, but Minty knew. "He did not stop to consider," she said. "He saw the opportunity and he seized it. It was only afterwards when—when it didn't turn out a success that he saw he hadn't been—been 'playing a straight game.'"

The young fellow turned his heavy eyes upon her with a feeling of gratitude. "That was it, Mother, I thought so much about the money I was going to make, that I never paused to consider—well—other things. I was outwitting Addison for my own ends, and I thought of how to do it and the risks and not whether it was right or wrong. But now that Uncle William puts it like this, of course I see that having your own way, and getting the better of other people and successfully keeping it dark, isn't all that there is to a deal."

"That you should have needed me to point it out," said the Colonel disgustedly.

"I've had my lesson," pleaded his nephew. "I

shall run straight in future." He was wearedly certain that the honour of business-men was not his honour, but he did not like to say so. Because he had been a member of the Stock Exchange he should have obeyed its regulations, that certainly; and because he had not done so they would cast him out—out into the sunshine! What did their opinion of him matter, when he would never see any one of them again?

"Well," said Colonel Smart and he spoke more leniently "at least you have a lifetime in which to make amends."

"Amends?" echoed the mother.

"Do you think then that he should get off scot-free?"

Mrs. Smart remembered her father's fate. For seven years he had been shut away from his kind and afterward when the prison gates had opened to let him out, who of all his friends had come forward? Not one. He had been allowed to disappear; and though his wife had been faithful, when he died, his passing had been unregretted, unregretted even by her. So had he made amends. Must Willy suffer in like measure? Must she?

"Oh, surely," she faltered, "the loss of his money, the fact that he has failed in his business, will be punishment enough?"

"Who knows?" said the Colonel grimly, and long after she was in bed that night the phrase, pregnant with doom, echoed in her ears. Who

knew what might not be in store for them all, for her foolish son, her unfortunate daughter and for herself, the mother who by her misdoing had brought these misfortunes upon the innocent heads of her children.

CHAPTER XX

THE Willy who came down to breakfast on the following morning was a different being to the weary and dispirited youth who had dragged himself to bed. His uncle bent on rubbing up a tarnished escutcheon ate little, but Willy had the hearty appetite which is supposed to go with a good conscience and made up for his poor performance on the preceding evening. The ordeal of an interview with the Addisons lay before him, but beyond it he could see the shining faces of innumerable free and glorious days. On the brink of a new life why should he trouble himself about one nearly at an end? This indifference may have been due to some lack in the young man's nature and indeed he kept it under and behaved as one brought low, but it was genuine. Liberty had been a primal need and no matter how it had been come by, liberty was now his. In spite of the quag in which he stood therefore, his heart rejoiced within him and was glad.

The day proved hot, the Addisons obdurate and the Colonel had his work cut out to make them take his point of view. But a silver tongue backed by a golden purse can work wonders; and in the end matters were satisfactorily arranged. Colonel Smart had been strongly affected by his nephew's conduct and would find it very hard to forgive, for

the young man was his heir as well as his namesake; but once he was certain that all fear of public disgrace was at an end, and he began to take a more comfortable if not more lenient view of the affair. "And now," said he, after relating to the anxious mother all that had been said and done, "we must be thinking of the future."

He glanced at his nephew, but Willy's face was unresponsive. He knew what he would do, but he was by no means certain what his mother and uncle would think of his plans, or rather of his lack of them.

"What do you advise?" asked Mrs. Smart. She was grateful to her brother-in-law for his kind offices, desirous indeed of offering a little womanly flattery, of burning a little incense of adulation.

"Oh advice, the boy must choose for himself. But I've been considering, and there are one or two openings I know of that might suit him——"

The young man was anxious not to seem ungracious. "Where?" said he. His uncle was really very kind, but it would not make any difference. He must go his own way.

"I have a friend Penn-keeping in Jamaica who is always lamenting the difficulty he finds in getting a white manager."

"Penn-keeping?" said Mrs. Smart, with the curiosity of the woman who does not read and is yet alive to the interesting ways of the foreigner.

"Stock-raising on large tracts of land," ex-

plained the Colonel. "Merriman would teach Willy his business and eventually make him manager. It's a good, healthy, manly life and a fine country."

Willy showed a sudden knowledge of the subject. "I suppose the men he usually gets have a touch of colour!"

"Generally. Ah, you've read about it?"

"I read everything about other countries that I can get hold of," said the young man modestly.

"If you don't care about that I know a man in Rhodesia who is running a store in connection with his farm. He wants a trustworthy young fellow to help him, one whom he could presently take into partnership."

"You have friends everywhere," said Mrs. Smart admiringly. She had an uneasy suspicion that this incalculable son of hers was about to spring some strange notion upon them, something of which her brother-in-law must disapprove. A man who is under a cloud cannot choose, he must take what is offered and to her mind both Penn-keeping and farming sounded respectable, and therefore desirable occupations. But Willy had not jumped at them. He was sitting very still and he was smiling. Mrs. Smart thought it an ominous smile. "But Willy does not know anything about stock," she ventured. "And these men, would they be willing to take a man who had his business to learn?"

"He'd pick it up fast enough." He turned to his nephew. "Well, my boy?"

Willy looked from his uncle to his mother, these good and kindly people, both of whom wished him well, but whose well was not his well! They would sell him into bondage and think they were doing him a good turn, for they wore the chains of conventionality as ornaments, while he saw them as what they were—chains. He had broken out of one cage and all they thought of was to find him another, but they were so kindly, so well-meaning, that he was chary of speaking his mind.

"I've been a lot of trouble to you sir, and I'm most grateful for your offers but——"

"Oh, if you have something else in view."

"No—but I do not want to tie myself down."

"You must do something."

Willy laid his right hand, palm downwards on the table, a square, blunt-fingered hand, very strong and capable. "This will keep me," he said. "I need not think of openings and opportunities as long as I have my health and this."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you," said the soldier bluffly.

The young man glanced at the sideboard. On it stood a biscuit box, in the shape of a globe, of a globe patterned over with the continents and oceans of the earth. Willy had brought it home at Christmas, and when it was empty had expressed a wish to have it kept between the copper urns that graced the top. Many a time his mother coming unexpectedly into the room had found him turning it over in

his hands. She was not surprised when he got up and fetching it, planted it before him on the serge table-cloth.

"Look!" he said. "Such a big world, such a number of places, of islands, of countries and I've lived in Eastham all my life." The flint-grey eyes darkened till they might have been mistaken for black. "Here—in Eastham! I did not know what I wanted or at least I knew but couldn't put a name to it and I thought if I could only make money I should be able to get away. I couldn't make the money and I won't try to again but I—I must go." There was a desperate insistence in his voice. This was Willy in earnest, so much in earnest that he was showing a boyish terror of coercion. His uncle and his mother had been in authority over him and it was as if he begged them to forget it, not to insist upon their rights.

"But where will you go?" asked the Colonel kindly. He had been a little hurt that the young fellow should not have consulted him about the future but he began to see there was no question of a billet.

Willy answered him with a feverish eagerness. "Where? All over the world. I will see everything and go everywhere. I will go up one road and down another and they shall be all new, all roads I have never seen before. And when I come to the end of the roads I will make paths for myself."

"But your livelihood?" cried his mother. Was this son of hers, this son whom she had reared to such respectabilities to become a sort of tramp? Was this to be the result of his suburban training, his grammar school teaching, his years in the city?

"Oh, I can work," said Willy, his face brightening. "Wherever I am I can work." And his mother saw that he had definitely declined to climb the stiff ladder of financial success. She was at once bewildered and troubled; and in her bewilderment she failed to grasp how this revelation of his real self would affect her.

"The Sir Jocelyn," said Colonel Smart, "who died in 1830, my great-grandfather, married a gypsy. She was said to have been fond of him and of her children, and yet—she left them. She left them and went back to her own people."

"Ah!" said Willy hoarsely.

"I don't know what the Smarts were like before her day, but they have been restless enough since."

"And she," said Willy as if it explained many things, "she was my ancestress."

"It appears so."

"But you too, uncle, you have felt as I do."

"To a certain extent. Of course it was the go-fever sent me into the service and thanks to that I've been about the world a bit, oh yes a goodish bit." But though he spoke cheerily, in his heart he envied the youth who had yet to go. He had travelled as a soldier and a gentleman, but the boy would

follow his instinct and go as a mere nomad. Class-feeling had ruled the Colonel; and yet at times the longing to go out as Willy would do, a man among other men, but nameless, pelfless, untrammelled by any demand of civilisation, had been almost too strong for him. However, the leaves of sixty years had fallen and he was still behind the hedge. He had never had the courage to step out into the open, to hold to his individuality at the cost—of what? Of all that made, that would make his old age comfortable.

"But I don't understand," complained Mrs. Smart, "I don't see what it all means."

"I shall come back, Mother," said Willy, still as one who deprecates the raising of obstacles, and his words sowed in her heart the knowledge that he was going from her. A fierce pain sprang from the seed.

"You will come back?" she echoed blankly.

"Every year or two."

But she had had the daily joy of him for five and twenty years. "Oh Willy!" she cried aghast.

The tenderness with which he had always regarded her softened his voice, but did not melt the underlying firmness. "I must go, mater, I am stifled here, I must go."

She ran to him and put restraining arms about him, as she had done when he was a little venturesome child. "Oh no!" she cried pitifully. "Oh no!"

The boy looked across at his uncle. The urgings of the nature which he had inherited, had grown too strong for him to dream of battling with them. He must go with the tide, must go in spite of his mother's cry; but because of it, would take a sore heart with him into the wilds.

"We mustn't interfere," said the old Colonel gently, and when he saw her face, was thankful that he had no wife, no children. He had always felt that Minty was younger than he; he knew now that they were of the same generation, that their day was over, their work at an end.

"Of course not," sobbed the woman, "I—I won't interfere, I never have, I won't now, but—oh, if I only understood!" She went slowly, her eyes blinded by tears, back to her chair. Why did Willy want to go? Was his home not to his liking? That comfort of the middle classes, of which the rich for all their luxury know nothing, had been his, the gift of her constant oversight and capacity. What more could she have done? What did he want?

"I suppose you've no idea," said the Colonel, distressed by the poignancy of Minty's resignation and anxious to get back to the concrete. "I suppose you've no idea where you will make a start?"

Willy looked past him, through the open window and out at the road. The dun-coloured dust of the sunny August day lay thick on its unrolled ribbon. Wheelmarks, hoofmarks, footmarks in multitudinous confusion broke up the pale surface; and

though the highway was at that evening hour almost deserted, he could yet see the throngs which, since the road was made, had streamed along its path. It was there that he would make a start, there that he would stand one morning, and at the tossing of a coin turn to the right or to the left. Mrs. Smart saw his eager glance, and though as far as ever from understanding, she interpreted it aright. Her apprehensions showed her the alert figure at the gate, the easy choice of route, and those long, striding steps, each one of which would carry this incomprehensible child of hers further and further from her.

"Ah no," said the Colonel, who had also seen the glance, "we'll give you a start."

"It will be all the same," said Willy. "No, not quite, though. It will mean that I shall get to some one place quicker than I could otherwise have hoped to, and life is not too long." He turned the globe over and over in his hands. "Well, then—Santa Fè de Bōgŏtã," and he smiled apologetically, "the name has always had an absurd fascination for me."

"Bōgŏtã?" repeated his uncle, unable for the moment to place it. "Oh yes, from Southampton to Cŏlōn, or perhaps Trinidad, and then up the Magdalena. Humph! as good a spot as another. I've been there—I think I told you about it?"

"No," said Willy eagerly.

"We were a long time getting up the river, for

the steamer spent most of her time resting on the sandbanks, and her weariness not having been arranged for by the commissariat, we were thinner when we arrived than when we started. It's a gold, silver, and emerald country. Should be pastoral, too, but isn't. Government too uncertain."

"But," said his puzzled mother, "you will get to this outlandish place, and what will you do then?"

"Oh prospect, or fight, or dig. I shall not do more work than I can help." He smiled, knowing how much he would astonish her, and enjoying it. "Work," he said deliberately, "is a curse."

"Work a curse?" repeated his mother, accepting the challenge with a sense that here at last she was on her own ground, she who was first and last a worker. Work a curse? To her it had always been a blessing.

"Well, mater, 'in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread'; it's the curse of Adam."

"Ah, but that was said a very long time ago," she answered slowly, "and it's come to be a blessing. Besides, if you don't work, you can't make money, and everybody wants to do that."

"I don't," said her son emphatically. "Mother, you like all the things other people do, to you success means a big house and nice things to eat and lots of servants, eh?"

She nodded wistfully, for she knew now that these things would never be Willy's. "You and

your father," she said almost inaudibly, "after all, you are alike in some things."

"Yes, the dad must have been a disappointment to you. I'm sorry that I haven't turned out better, but there it is, you can't change an oak into a walnut because you happen to prefer that kind of tree."

"No," said Mrs. Smart, but she wished the age of miracles were not past. For the nonce she must accept a state of affairs alien to her and painful, but she would pray that this goat might presently be changed into a sheep. It was with a distinct feeling of relief that she remembered she might besiege the courts of heaven. Night and morning she would offer her petitions. Remembering the parable of the unjust judge, and in the hope and expectation of being given a new Willy, she determined to be insistent in prayer.

"Ah dearie," she said, with a pathetic note in her voice, "when you get to those strange, outlandish places, don't forget that I shall be here, that I shall be always waiting, looking out for you, expecting you."

And before both men rose that pitiful figure of the waiting woman, of her chair set summer and winter by the window, of the snow of time falling flake by flake, until its white storm hid her figure from view—until there was only the empty chair.

CHAPTER XXI

If Willy Smart could have done as he wished, he would, as he expressed it, "have got on the back of a tramp and gone west," would have worked his way out as a seaman, and thus have begun that acquiring of many trades which is incidental to the life of the born wanderer. But Colonel Smart, with a twinge of conscience, for Willy had been his heir, and now it seemed as if little Jocelyn Flowerdew would have the bulk of the money, had decided otherwise; and a berth on one of the Royal Mail steamers had been booked. So Willy, going out to leave footprints on untrodden ways, began his travels as a first-class passenger on the *Tagus;* and his mother went down to Southampton to see him off and wish him all the things that he least desired.

The ship began to move slowly down Southampton Water, and as the space of blue sea widened between herself and her son, the tears, restrained all day, began to slip one after the other down Mrs. Smart's cheeks. They blurred for her the tall grey figure leaning on the bulwarks and looking back; and yet they helped her to regain her self-control. The streets were not a fitting place for the indulgence of grief, nor her age one at which people

usually gave way to their feelings. She felt ashamed as she wiped them hurriedly away, striving through their haze to catch one more glimpse of Willy—Willy, motionless amid a foolish waving of handkerchiefs; Willy, with the sun shining on the black ripple of his hair; Willy, her only son.

The man who came back would not be the youth, callow and tender, who had bidden her farewell. Her son, her first-born, the child she had reared and trained, whose thoughts she believed she had read, and to whose body she had certainly ministered, was going, going across the mountainous seas, out into the unknown. Alas, poor mother, what are the pangs when "a man is born into the world" to those others that yield him to a new universe of which you know nothing?

The ship passed slowly on between the flat green shores, and Mrs. Smart, convinced that she could no longer distinguish her son among the ranks of his fellow-passengers, turned quietly away. She was not one to insist upon her griefs, and though at the moment she found it a little difficult to think of anything else, it would not be long before she would be looking forward to his return, before she would be writing him long letters full of the aroma of domesticity and weaving about him a golden tissue of fresh ambitions.

She walked slowly back to the station, her feet falling absent-mindedly upon the unfamiliar road, and her mind clearly but sorrowfully reviewing the

events of the last few months. She had come to believe that the troubles which assailed her children were due to her. She had not said so; nothing short of inquisitorial torture indeed, could have dragged from her such an admission, but she believed it. Nor had she been easily convinced. Being so eminently respectable, of such irreproachable conduct, the voice of conscience had an unfamiliar sound. Mrs. Smart had sought to hush down its first utterances and impute Flowerdew's failure to other causes; but Willy's troubles had been crushing, and Colonel Smart's assertion that people cannot do wrong and repent, but must also make amends, overwhelming. Unwilling as she was to admit it even to herself, events had cruelly convinced her that she had had no right to keep the jewels, no right to turn them into money, no right to give that money to Eva and Willy. And because they had had the five thousand pounds, upon them had fallen the vengeance of heaven. Ah no, not quite that. It had fallen upon them because only thus could she be reached. She did not question the justice which in order to punish her had struck at the children, and that because she seemed to herself—as we all do—of a peculiar importance. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children," came home to her, not as a curious injustice, but as a deep and awful truth. It never occurred to Mrs. Smart to sit in judgment on the forces that had evolved her. She did not question, she accepted.

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? That her children knew nothing of the jewels, had had no voice in their disposal, would indeed in all probability have tried to return them, did not strike her as a reason for their being spared. As far as Mrs. Smart could determine, neither human nor divine law was based upon abstract justice; but she understood that certain laws were made, and that if you offended against them, you were punished, and it seemed more important that the guilty should be punished than that the innocent should escape.

Difficult as it was to believe, it was none the less true that it was she and not some inferior creature who had been guilty of an infringement of these laws! Though she had always been willing, when decorously seated in her pew, with her feet on a red hassock and her prayer-book and hymnal laid out before her, to acknowledge herself a sinner, a miserable sinner, nothing would have surprised her more than for anyone to have assumed her sinful in her private capacity. For one thing, she knew better. Moral turpitude and she, had not even a bowing acquaintance. No one did their duty as wife, mother and housekeeper more thoroughly than she, and being fully aware of this, she had always had the comforting if pharisaical conviction that if anybody deserved a heavenly mansion, it was she. A sinner? Nonsense! she was a good woman; not a saint, oh no, but a really good woman.

As Mrs. Smart believed that Jesus of Nazareth,

exemplar of all that was good and holy, had, by dying a painful death, redeemed the world, it was only in keeping with her creed that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. But to her there was a wide difference between the Christ who had offered himself and these others who had had no choice in the matter. She had accepted his sacrifice with equanimity, professing herself grateful when in church, but otherwise rarely thinking about it; but the sacrifice of her children, so near, so dear, so precious—oh, it was different altogether. In her new rôle of convicted sinner, Minty Smart shivered and was afraid. So much had already happened, so much more might come to pass. She was willing enough, poor soul, to make amends—if she could.

If she could have given back the jewels she would have hastened to do so, but they were gone, gone too were the five thousand pounds which they had bought. Besides even if she had had the money, to whom could she have sent it? The Chancellor of the Exchequer?

"But that is what I must do," she said to herself as she walked down the platform toward the train. "I must pay it back. In some way, to a charity or a hospital or something, I must pay it back."

She thought she would do so unostentatiously, for she wished to draw heavenly and not earthly attention to her proceedings; and then she began to

wonder how it would be possible for her to obtain so great a sum, for she felt that it would hardly be making restitution unless with the labour of hands and head, she earned it. Moreover, although she had been thrifty and had managed to put by a good deal of money, she had always looked upon these savings as the property of her children. She had brought disaster upon them, but that was enough; she would not rob them.

She had a first-class return, but instinctively she walked towards the cheerful third-class carriages. Of all ways of wasting money, Mrs. Smart had least patience with that which paid more for travelling than the lowest possible. The greater comfort, cleanliness and seclusion of the first-class compartments did not appeal to her, for she liked company, a baby or two, and the possibility of a chat. Having on this occasion a first-class ticket, however, her thrifty mind led her to make use of it, and she changed hastily from the compartment she had selected to the nearest blue-cushioned first. So hasty, indeed, was her entry that she stumbled and nearly fell over the legs of a travelling companion; and in some confusion and with many apologies, seated herself on the opposite side, as far as possible from him.

It being a warm day towards the end of August, Mrs. Smart was wearing her coolest dress, a dark tussore, severely plain but lightened, as far as the bodice was concerned, by a vest of white embroid-

ered silk. Her hat of a broad Tuscan straw was wreathed with gauze of a lighter shade, and she carried a cheap, dark parasol. Forty-eight was she, and the curves of her fine figure bore witness to it; but her eye was clear and the firm flesh of cheek and hand spoke of abstemious living and a kind digestion; and the only other occupant of the compartment into which she had stumbled, looked at her with the admiration of the man who has seen many types and has learnt to discriminate. He was a small, thin man with a rosy skin and eyes which were exceptionally bright and clear; and as Mrs. Smart looked across the carriage, she was amused to find herself thinking of him as a pretty girl. He had met her before, but was not aware of it, for his work brought him into contact with innumerable fresh faces, and all humanity had come, consequently, to wear a familiar look. To Mrs. Smart, however, a face and figure once seen was generally graven lightly but definitely on her memory. She was seldom in the society of strangers, she did not often make a new acquaintance, and as she sat, breathing deeply after her rush up the platform, she wondered to find that though she could not put a name to him, the face and figure of her companion seemed startlingly familiar. She groped among her memories. When had she seen that broad white brow, that contradictory chin and narrow lips? Not at Eastham, not at Morton House, not at Ashwater. Then where?

Mrs. Smart was not a novel reader, and she had seen the morning paper, so with hands loose in her lap, she sat looking out of the window, a picture of sedate maturity; and being very tired, for emotion is exhausting, she presently nodded off to sleep. The train stopping at Winchester awakened her, and it was then that she recognised her fellow-traveller. He had signalled to a boy with tea, and idly watching him, she saw the long acquisitive fingers touch the cup tentatively, as if to gauge the heat of the contained liquid.

She had seen those sensitive fingers touch other things, touch them in exactly the same way, and she had a sudden vision of a slim man standing by the mantel-shelf in her bedroom and touching very lightly a half-opened Swiss box. Her fellow-traveller was the man who had left the jewels, those unlucky, those accursed, those exquisite stones, in her house.

She looked at him with an awakening of interest, of which so sensitive a creature as Tharp could not remain unconscious. He did not know who the woman was, though her face was vaguely familiar; but he saw that her glance was friendly. He supposed, therefore, that she must be one of the innumerable people with whom as a reporter he was daily being brought into contact; that he was recognised in his secondary capacity of burglar never entered his head.

"You look as if you thought you knew me,

ma'am," he said amiably. He was socially inclined, and to-day it would please him better to talk than to read the commonplace story of adventure which he had bought at the Cowes bookstall.

"Well," said Mrs. Smart, as pleased as he at the prospect of a chat, "I do and I do not. I've met you before, but I don't know your name."

It was a clever cast, but the fish did not rise. "Was I reporting in your neighbourhood?" he asked.

A grim smile curled the corners of her lips. "Reporting?" she said. "You don't mean to say you are a reporter?"

"Oh, I've been most things in my time," he replied with airy vagueness. "Then you don't know where I had the pleasure of meeting you?"

Mrs. Smart's smile broadened. "But indeed I do," she said, and leant forward that her words might come with greater force. "It was Christmas Day, two and a half years ago, or perhaps I should say Christmas night, and you were after some jewellery. We met"—her smile had parted the lips over her broad, good-natured teeth and was shortening the whole heavy face—"we met in my bedroom."

For a moment, while his mind at racing pace dealt with the situation, Tom Tharp looked blankly before him. She had no proof that he was the man she proclaimed him to be, and if he denied it, he would silence though he might not convince her.

On the other hand, the unsolved problem of long ago still lay in one of his mental pigeon-holes, and the opportunity was unique. His instinct told him that the woman was friendly, and, after all, he need not admit more than he chose. He sighed, and in drawing the longer breath made himself cough, and it was some minutes before he could speak.

"You seem in rather a poor way," Mrs. Smart said, her pleasure in the little shock which she had given him vanishing. He did not look well, the extreme delicacy of his skin, the hollow cheeks and temples, the bright blue eyes and vivacious manner, were all ominous of decay; and consumption was too common a disease for her not to recognise the signs of it.

"I've just come back from Ventnor," he told her. "Been there for the open-air cure."

"You don't say so?" It was some time since she had discovered that burglars were only men; she now learnt that they were no more than mortal. "Did it do you any good?"

"Oh yes," he answered, with that hopefulness which is one of the signs of his complaint. "It's a slow business, of course, but I'm better than I was, much better. A winter in the south of France and I shall be my own man again. It was the late nights and broken sleep and being out in all weathers that did it. I mean," he added, catching her eye and smiling wryly, "the being out in all weathers, reporting."

"For the other business, you could please yourself and choose your weather."

"And I did," he said, admitting, because he saw no further reason for caution, that her recognition of him had not been a mistake.

"When you touched that cup of tea I knew it was you," she said, pleased at her perspicacity. "You see, I'd watched you nearly all the time you were in my room."

"Had you?" He gave this statement the consideration it deserved. "Then I was right," he said at last, "and you had the packet?"

"Oh yes, I had it," Mrs. Smart said casually.

The other laughed and coughed. "Well, of all the cool customers," he spluttered, rubbing his hands together. They were dry hands and the skin of them emitted a faint sound, as of snake-scales rasping over one another.

"A good deal has happened to me since then," murmured Mrs. Smart apologetically. Her trove had once bulked largely in her mind, but now she only thought of it with distaste. "Somehow I took it for granted that you knew."

"I only suspected."

It was Mrs. Smart's turn to sigh. "I've just been to Southampton to see my son off. He's going to South America, and I don't know when he'll be back."

Tharp admitted the relevance of the remark. If he had just had to say good-bye to little Tom and

George, he knew how he would be feeling about such lesser matters as jewels. But his separation from Florence and the boys was almost at an end. He was going home. "Ah, then of course other things wouldn't seem to you of much importance!" he said sympathetically.

Mrs. Smart was moved to tell him what she had done and why. "I put the necklace and that, into a little box on the mantel-piece and left it half open. I thought you would come back."

Tharp was surprised. "That was cute of you," he allowed, "but for the life of me I can't see why you kept them."

"I couldn't wear them," Mrs. Smart said simply, "but I could sell them, and I did."

She began to rise in his estimation. "But you wouldn't know where to take them."

"I loosened the stones until I got them all out, and then my brother-in-law took them to a man in the city, and he gave me five thousand pounds for them."

"Five thousand pounds? Whew!"

"Of course I invented a story, and I suppose I oughtn't to have done that, but at the time it seemed necessary."

"And they believed you?"

"Oh yes." She looked at him gravely, and he saw that that would follow. Her manner was so convincing.

"But five thou'," he said ingenuously. "Why, I

didn't hope to make more'n a third of that. It's a little fortune. Really you have been lucky."

The word was unfortunate, for it reminded her that lucky was just what she had not been. She had enjoyed astonishing her whilom antagonist, but now her pleasant motherly face lost its smile. "Lucky?" she said slowly. "I don't know about that. The money never did me any good, and now it's gone."

"You can't have your cake and eat it."

"Cake? It's been an unwholesome cake to me and mine."

"What d'you mean?"

"Well, everything I've done with that five thousand pounds has turned out badly."

"I shouldn't think anything of that."

"Wouldn't you? And yet——" She paused, for she had been on the verge of pointing out to him that though still a young man the ground on which he stood was crumbling and before long must give him that last refuge of poor humanity, an earthen bed. In one way or another, thought she, we are punished for our misdeeds. But it did not occur to her that this waif, the child of consumptive parents, and born with a consumptive tendency, must, even had his life been that of a "plaster saint," have contracted the disease.

"Well?"

"I was thinking that you don't look as if you'd had any too good a time."

"I've been seedy this last year or two, but I'm better now. I've had three months at Ventnor, and I've put on weight. The night sweats bother me a bit, but I can get about; and that's more'n I could do when I went down. I'm all right," and in proof of it he began to cough.

Mrs. Smart knew illness when she saw it, and his jaunty words did not deceive her. "We don't look at things in the same light," she said placidly. "I took the packet because I wanted to see what was inside it; and when I knew, I kept it—well, I really believe it was partly because you wanted it. I used to be a daring sort of girl, and when you don't know what's going to happen, things are more interesting. I thought I'd like to see whether you'd come back and what you would do. It somehow never occurred to me that there was any right or wrong about the matter. But, of course, there is."

"Right or wrong!" said the man with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "But that's rot. It was just which is the more fly. And you won. Upon my sam, I don't grudge it to you, though five thou'!"

He had saved and invested more thousands than five, had in truth a comfortable sum invested in gilt-edged securities, but he could have done with the proceeds of those jewels. His respect for Mrs. Smart was steadily on the increase, for even Florence, the loyal and generous, had never proved herself cleverer than he.

"Well," said she, "all I can say is that I wish I'd left it alone."

"What's done's done."

"It can be undone," said the other stubbornly.

"How?"

"I can give back the money."

His respect for her began to waver. "Oh come," he said, "that would be silly."

"I think you must have been badly brought up," she returned severely. She might amuse herself with him, but in the end the lawlessness of his outlook would irritate her. "If you hadn't you'd know that when you do wrong you have to make amends."

"I've never cared whether a thing was right or wrong," averred Tharp. "I've pleased myself and done as I liked, and it's panned out all right."

But to Mrs. Smart, looking from his sunken temples to the peculiar brilliancy of his complexion, it seemed very far from having "panned out all right."

"Besides," he said suddenly, "you've spent the money, so how can you give it back?"

The good woman's dignity abated. "I haven't thought out the details, but I suppose I shall have to earn it. I don't quite know how?"

"You are going to earn five thousand pounds?"

"I like work," she said, misunderstanding him. "It helps to pass the time."

"But five thousand pounds!"

"It does seem a lot," and she was silent, contemplating a future out of which she was going to squeeze sovereign by sovereign, a sackful of golden coins, a future that would be filled with labour and in which she would not have time to remember that she was lonely.

Tharp had been studying her. Never before had he met so extraordinary a person, at once so clever and so foolish. "But you don't know whose jewels they were."

She looked up eagerly. "You could tell me?"

"I could." He ruminated, as disinclined to part with his information as with any other possession. "It couldn't do me any harm if I were to tell you," he said at last. "Well, here goes. I got 'em at Long Reedham. They belonged to Lady Dudley Bodger."

Mrs. Smart knew the name. "Lady Bodger of Tulsey Park."

"Yes, Lady Dudley Bodger, Tulsey Park, Long Reedham. D'you know I was the man sent down to report that burglary? Me—and I'd done it. Wasn't it a joke? I enjoyed myself that day."

But she hardly heard. "I'm very much obliged to you," she said, pursuing her own train of thought. "Of course I'd sooner the lady had the money, than just a hospital or some charity. After all, they were her things. Lady Bodger, Tulsey Park, Long Reedham. I shan't forget. Besides, I've seen her. She comes to open bazaars at Eastham. To think

those beautiful stones belonged to an old creature like that; somehow I'd always pictured them on a young girl!" She had seen the lady in question on a platform and under a bright light, she had marked her wrinkles, her wig, and her decrepitude, and she could not imagine the sapphires about that scraggy brown throat, or the tiara on that pile of chestnut curls. Mrs. Smart had a wholesome objection to fine feathers on an old bird; she felt that age should be restful, white-haired, quiet-spoken, that the hurry of life was for the young. To her Lady Dudley Bodger, who had been a beauty and was unable to forget it, was a thorough-going example of those upper classes whom from the bottom of her plebeian soul she contemned. And to think it was she who had been the owner of the jewels!

The train was running into the haze of London, and at Vauxhall Tharp got out. The green "Elephant and Castle" bus would convey him nearly to his destination, his baggage having preceded him as "Advance Luggage."

"Well, good-afternoon," said he. "Glad to have met you. You've given me a jolly good story to tell against myself," and Mrs. Smart wondered to whom he would tell it. She looked out of the window and watched him walking away. There are seldom many people on the platforms at Vauxhall, and she could easily keep him in sight. A well-dressed young woman, tall, fair, but with somewhat opulent curves, who had been sitting between two

little boys on a bench, rose as he approached. He greeted the woman affectionately, but his face was turned toward the children, and it was evident that the mother, willing it should be so, was calling his attention to this and that detail concerning them. They were good-looking, curly-pated rogues, as delighted to come and meet their father as he to see them; and as the train started again, the little family began to stroll happily away along the platform on its way to the bus and Camberwell. As Mrs. Smart watched them a strange hunger swept into her heart, for she, too, had once had a laddie leaping and dancing at her side, the laddie who had shot up into unfamiliar manhood, and going, had left her behind.

CHAPTER XXII

From Waterloo Mrs. Smart drove across to Victoria, where a leisurely train was waiting to take her down to Ashwater. Trains with Eastham as their destination were always in a hurry; their suburb was an important one, only half an hour's journey from town, and they must shew that they were as bustling and up-to-date as the smart business men they carried. But with Ashwater, in spite of the invading army of red bricks, it was different. The little, rather dirty trains lingered in a siding, and when they could be prevailed upon to start, went sauntering by pleasant copses and sleepy villages, until allowed to pause at the tiny country stations that dotted the route.

Mrs. Smart had once more broken her word to Tamsin; but Eva being at the farm and able to keep an eye upon things, it had not so much mattered, and the Cornishwoman was gone off to Port Isaac at the time appointed. Mrs. Smart wondered whether she would be at Old Meadow Farm when she arrived. For she was not returning to The Laurels, at least not yet, not until she felt better able to face its ten empty rooms. She was pre-eminently a woman who looked forward, and though she had only so lately bidden her son fare-

well, she was already thinking of little Jocelyn and the solace it would afford her to fold him in her arms. He already gave baby promise of growing into such another as her Willy, even to the ripple in his hair, which as yet was of that light tow colour which mothers call golden. His chirping voice, his little dewy lips, his rose-leaf skin were so many lures to draw a lonely heart to the farm, and Mrs. Smart knew he would bring back the memories and the happiness of long ago, when she was the young mother of such an one.

It was evening before the sleepy train drew up at Ashwater, and Mrs. Smart, tired after her day's travelling, was glad to see that Eva had brought the old pony and little springless cart to meet her. She was not careful of her comfort, and the bumping jiggity-jog of the old-fashioned conveyance would not seem to her a matter for complaint. She was so thankful not to have to walk!

"Well dearie," she said, as she seated herself beside Mrs. Flowerdew, "I saw him off, and now I shall only think of when we may hope to have him back. After all, a year or two's knocking about doesn't hurt a man. I've no doubt that in the long run he'll settle down all the more thoroughly for it."

"No doubt," said Eva softly, but she knew the wild bird would not come back to the poultry yard. Willy had gone out of their lives, and his sister knew it, but seeing hope as transmuted happiness

she was merciful to her mother's blindness. She would leave her to her dreams, those dreams which grow fewer as we grow older, fewer and more precious. "Tamsin came back yesterday," she said, as they turned into their own lane, with its broad grass ridings and narrow strip of rutted cartway, and saw the white glimmer of farmhouse walls. "She has made up her mind at last."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Smart, too tired to feel her usual interest in the concerns of others. "And what will she do?"

"That she is waiting to tell you. To all my questions it is: 'Ah do belong to tell Miss Minty first.' But I fancy she means to marry her old sweetheart. There's a sort of smirking satisfaction about her that I have noticed in other brides; and she has actually bought herself a tail of hair, rather lighter in colour than her own."

"It's funny to me how she can be bothered to change her state," said Mrs. Smart, as they turned in at the big gate and drove towards the stable. "A farm to manage or a man to look after, the one seems to me about as good a life as the other."

"But Tamsin doesn't think so. There's the charm of the unknown for her about married life."

"That's it, I suppose," and Mrs. Smart climbed down over the shaft. A twinge of pain in her back reminded her that she had only lately recovered from a mild attack of lumbago, and, thinking of it, she hoped she would not have a rheumatic old age.

Eva, unharnessing the pony, turned him loose, and the two women walked towards the kitchen garden.

Suddenly Eva's soft laugh rang out. "Oh, mother, if Tamsin has not been watering the herbs and the rows of lettuces!"

"Well?" Mrs. Smart had been rejoicing in the scent of the warm damp earth.

"But she hasn't spared so much as a bucket for the lilies and late roses."

Mrs. Smart smiled. It was just Tamsin, Tamsin with her eye to the main chance and her carelessness of beauty; and there at the kitchen door, her stumpy figure outlined against the light of the lamp, was the individual in question. She had heard them drive in, and with hand above her eyes was peering through the soft August dusk to catch a glimpse of them.

"Supper's ready this long time," she said, as she shook hands with Mrs. Smart, "and Ah do expect as you're fine and tired. Had a weariful day, haven't 'ee?" And she turned back into the long raftered room.

On the table were only cheese, bread, and radishes, but a comforting smell of broth came from the direction of the fire. "Ah've sent Susan on home," continued their hostess, as with the ease of one born to labour she lifted off a heavy saucepan, "for Ah do want to tell 'ee all as Ah've a-done," and in a minute a sheep's head, with the usual accompaniments of turnips, carrots, onions and pearl

barley, was steaming on a large dish which had been standing ready. "Sit 'ee down, my dear life," cried Tamsin, bustling about hospitably, "your hat's no matter. Supper first, and then us can talk."

Mrs. Smart slipped into the chair she had always occupied, and if it had not been that she was promoted to knife, fork and plate instead of the blue-banded bowl, could have imagined she was still a child. As long as she could remember, a trail of ivy had grown across the panes of the upper part of the window, and when the wind blew, had tap-tapped against it in most eerie fashion. Now in a slight breeze which had sprung up at sundown the stem, white against the glass, was tap-tapping as of old. Mrs. Smart could hardly believe that thirty years had passed since the days when she had sat with her mother at this same table and watched the ivy. With what silent swiftness the years had flown, and how was it that in spite of all her experiences she felt no older? She had passed the line of middle-age, she had loved, she had sorrowed over new-made graves, she had seen her children go from her, and yet she carried in her breast the heart of a girl. Was age then a myth? Did the body come to maturity, halt a little, and then slowly fade, leaving the mind young and fresh? Had her mother at seventy felt as she did to-day? It was not often that Minty originated a thought, and when she did it was apt to perplex and trouble her. She ate

thankfully, but she did not talk, and the others supposed her silence to be due to weariness.

"Ah shall have the stock vallyed," said Tamsin suddenly, and Eva emerged from a dream of the future—of when Archie should have come home!

"How was Captain Jan?" asked Mrs. Smart, unable to follow her drift, but unwilling to quench the little spark of conversation.

"Braäve," replied his sweetheart. The man was a little wizened fellow all wrinkles and leanness, but with a spark of blue light shining out between his scanty eyelashes. "He do want me to come back afore Xmas."

"Well?"

"He 'oan't wait no longer. 'Tes a pinchin' plaäce for me to be in, seein' as Ah do love the old farm and yet Ah'd like fine to be Mrs. Honey. But there 'tes, Ah've chose." She breathed gustily, and Eva saw that it was not so much the man as the condition which attracted her.

"You are going back!" she said, more as an assertion than as a question. At Tamsin's time of life it was really rather difficult to see what she wanted with a husband.

But the Cornishwoman thought differently; and the smirk came back to her features as she explained. "My sister Sabina, her ain't never had an offer and her do hate as Ah should be thinking of gettin' married, and me two year older'n she. Some maids,

now, dunno what 'tes, but them can't never get a chap." She looked so eminently self-satisfied that Mrs. Flowerdew would have liked to take her by her bowed shoulders and shake her, but Minty saw further into the matter. She could understand the pride of the old maid in a success which, if belated, was only the more welcome, and to her Tamsin's marriage seemed neither absurd nor reprehensible. Though old and withered, she was yet entering upon her woman's kingdom. Youth had gone, and comeliness had followed it, but now, though it was late, so late, her money, earned by the sweat of her brow, was buying her what she had always secretly longed for, the status of married woman. "Oh, iss," she said. "Ah'm goin' back. Ah've pramussed."

"And the farm?" asked Eva.

"It do belong to Miss Minty. Her can do as her pleases wi't."

"Oh, mother'll let it."

"That would be a pity," Mrs. Smart interposed thoughtfully, for here surely was the opportunity of which she had been in search. "No ordinary person would make it pay. You have to know the land and what it can do."

"Iss, fay."

"Now I could make something of it."

"Oh, but mother," cried Eva in amazement, "you wouldn't like to give up The Laurels and come here?"

Mrs. Smart looked down at the coarse clean cloth.

"The Laurels?" she said slowly. "Richard's gone, you're gone, Willy's gone, what is The Laurels to me? An empty house. I'd be happier here."

Mrs. Flowerdew felt that she had been tactless. "But the work," she murmured; "there's a great deal to do."

And Mrs. Smart repeated what she had said to Tharp. "I like work, it helps to pass the time." She turned to Tamsin. "We will have the stock valued," she said resolutely, "and I'll buy it of you." The thought had slipped into her mind that thus with clean hands could she earn money, and if her mother had been able to save, so too, could she. Whether or no she ever earned the whole five thousand pounds did not seem to matter, the point was that by working hard and putting by what she could, she would be proving her anxiety to atone. She would send Lady Dudley Bodger the few stones —diamond, amethyst, pearl, and opal—which she had retained, also their crushed settings; and in the course of time this first package should be followed by others, others full of coin, the coin which she had earned and saved. Tamsin's prospective marriage was shewing her the way out of her difficulties and she blessed Captain Honey, strange old sea-faring man, with the blue eyes which had seen through a brick wall and into a fat banking account; for as soon as she was at work, she would be able to hope that better times were in store for her and hers, that Archie Flowerdew might become temperate and

Willy be given back to suburban respectabilities. Since her son had insisted upon his right to go penniless into a world where those who do not work cannot expect to eat, she had thought of him as hungry, as reduced to sleeping in the open, under the blue vault of heaven, out—oh, horrible thought! —out of his bed. She felt now that if she laboured to make amends, tending the farm creatures, driving shrewd bargains, living austerely, there would be no fear of this, no fear of his going hungry, no fear of his sleeping out.

For a time the three women stirred their simmering thoughts in silence. Eva had been taken aback by her mother's sudden decision, but as she considered, she saw the wisdom of the plan. Why should her mother stay in Eastham and spend her time in keeping clean an empty house when here was work waiting to be done? Tamsin had increased the business, had bought Leghorns as well as Wyandottes, and had started turkeys; but her mother need not do so much. She had enough to live on, and if she did not make by the farm, neither would she be likely to lose, and it would be a distraction. Eva was painfully conscious of the emptiness of her mother's life, she did not know how great a comfort she and little Jocelyn were and how that interest would grow. Mrs. Smart no longer wanted children in her house, except as visitors; she would be content to see her grandson at intervals, to love him at a distance; but this Eva did not understand.

A sudden thought struck her, and she looked across at her mother. "I was coming to you in October," she said slowly.

Tamsin understood. "Ah pramussed Ah'd go afore Christmas," she said, "and so Ah will—the day afore, and no suner. There be the turkeys and the geese and ducks and the fowls to see to. Ah've sold'n and Ah must fat'n. Ah rackon Ah've my work cut out for the neist month or two if Ah'm to please all they customers." She paused, looking back. "And Ah did think to buy a two-three yowes this autumn and see what Ah cud do wi' early lamb. There does be good feed, short sweet stuff in the hill meadow."

Mrs. Smart was willing to pick up any hints she could. "So I've always thought," she averred.

"Good feed and a lew hedge agen the winds," continued Tamsin. "A two-three yowes 'ud do well there. Ah was thinkin', too, of that slip o' land 'tother side of the li'l river. They do say as 'tes for sale. If us had that, the farm 'ud be more vallyable, and there'd be a longer bit o' river for they ducks and geese. But what's the good of talking," she concluded disconsolately. "Ah won't never buy that slip o' land now."

"You want me to take over the farm in December, after you have disposed of the Christmas stock?"

"Iss."

"That will suit me perfectly. Let's see, there'll

be the early broods to look after then—oh, but of course we can talk over all that later."

"That egg-cubator," said Tamsin eagerly, "have proved a perfect god-send. Ah'm glad Ah bought'n."

"Yes, it saves trouble."

"Aw, an' life, tho' they do say as its chicks belong to be whisht."

"What will you do with The Laurels, mother?" interposed Eva, who was not interested in early broods and incubators.

"Let it, dearie. It is a good house and has a nice piece of garden, and should let well."

Mrs. Flowerdew, for no reason in particular, was privately averse to its passing into the hands of strangers, but she did not protest. During the last six months change had been the order of her family's existence, and though like most women she craved stability, she felt the uselessness of rebellion. "You will live here, then," she said, "just as Granny did. How curious that you should take up her work; it will be almost as if you were Granny herself come back."

Mrs. Smart looked across at the blooming girl, as her mother had looked across at her. Life was repeating itself. Eva had all which she had had, and in the course of time might come to as lonely 'a middle-age. How strange! She had thought the busy fulness of earlier days must last her to the end, but as the hours had flown, the leaves had fallen,

and she stood stark at last. The leaves had fallen, but the sap was still in the tree and the forester had not yet come to blaze it. But presently she would hear the menace of his step, she would fall like the others of her generation, and green things growing over the place where she had stood, she would be forgotten, her pleasant shade, her lofty crown of leaves, her good hard wood all forgotten, forgotten as utterly as if they had never been.

CHAPTER XXIII

Little Jocelyn had been born on the 8th of October, but his sister did not make her appearance until the last day of that month. She was a small baby, fat and round, with vague dark eyes and a wistful expression, an expression so like what her mother had come to wear that Mrs. Smart remarked upon it.

"Like me is she?" said the young mother. "Like what I was as a baby?"

"Well yes," said the proud grandmother, "same dark hair and neat features, but you were bigger."

"Ah Mother, you've forgotten."

Mrs. Smart did not tell her that there are some things which a woman never forgets. She had a perfect recollection of Eva's birth, of the little foolish, seeking face which she had thought so beautiful, so adorable. She remembered the pride with which, when Richard came back from town, she had laid his daughter in his arms. And now that daughter was a mother, but with no husband in whose arms to lay her child.

Eva too, thought of the absent, yearning after him, longing for his return. Her face, which should have been bright and careless, wore a look of ex-

pectation; and as she lay silent in the white bed of her girlhood, she was not so much resting as listening. In the afternoon, after the young mother had slept, Mrs. Johnson stole up to see the newcomer. In spite of the girl's Philistinism, she had grown to like her sister-in-law, and when she heard the baby was come, she had dragged herself off her sofa and motored down to welcome it.

"It's not a Flowerdew," she said, and was glad of it. Nerves and ill-health, perhaps even a crooked spine like her own, might have been its heritage if it had taken after its father's family.

"Archie asked me to give him a little girl with my eyes," answered its mother shyly. "And he wanted her to be called Mary."

"Mary? Oh I'm glad. I always used to think I had such a pretty name—Mary Flowerdew. And to have changed it for Johnson!"

Mrs. Smart, coming in with a bowl of gruel—she believed in the old-fashioned milk-making stuff—drove the intruder out; but she went with her to the head of the stairs. "Archie ought to be here," she said anxiously. "I can see that the child is fretting after him. Until the baby was born she wouldn't allow herself to, but now"—she made a helpless gesture—"oh," said she, "some people are beyond my understanding."

Mary Johnson, tall and slender, in the loose draperies which her invalidism compelled her to wear, paused upon a stair. "He will come," she said

loyally, "and soon. I am sure of it, sure of it." She had her secret doubts, but afterwards she was glad she had not allowed them to appear—for Archie came back.

That evening as Eva, after a quiet day, was lying looking towards the small and merry fire by which her mother sat, a familiar knock fell upon the outer door. Mrs. Smart got up slowly. The day had been a busy one, and she was tired, but the servant being out, it was necessary for her to go down. "What a nuisance," she said, and yawned as she carried the infant, which she had been nursing, across to its mother.

"It was Archie's knock," said the girl in a whisper, her large brown eyes alight with hope and fear.

But the other could not credit it. "Oh no," she said, "he wouldn't come all of a sudden like this, he'd know it would be bad for you."

"Men don't think," said Eva, but for all that the fear in her eyes increased and the hope lessened. "Oh but," she cried, as once more it assailed the silence, "I should know his knock in a thousand."

"Here, I must go," said Mrs. Smart, hastily placing the baby in the crook of its mother's arm.

She had not troubled to light the hall-lamp and the passage was consequently in darkness; but outside the glow of a dead sunset still faintly irradiated the sky, and by its light Mrs. Smart in opening the door was able to recognise her visitor. Eva had

been right. On this day of all days, when she was feeling as if she could not live without him any longer, he was come.

Mrs. Smart held out a hearty hand. "Well now, if this isn't lucky," she cried. "You're the man of all others I wanted to see," and she drew him across the threshold.

"Eva?" said he.

"She had a little daughter this morning and both are doing well."

"Thank God," said the man in a low voice and speaking very fervently; and from that moment, his mother-in-law's heart melted to him. He was a queer creature, but it was evident that her dear Eva was all the world to him. "Can I—will she be able to see me?"

"Oh yes, but you mustn't stay long," and she led the way up to her daughter's room. "I shall come for you in a quarter of an hour," and then she stood aside to let him pass. "You were right, dearie," she called through the opening door; and drew it softly to behind him, only too glad this time to be left alone—outside.

It was not until some days later that they were able to extract from the wanderer an account of his doings. The Archie who had returned was browned, indeed almost bronzed, and as he had come straight from Liverpool it was natural to suppose he had been abroad. He looked very well, wore excellent clothes and had an altogether prosperous

appearance, but he was quieter than of old, less supercilious. Wherever he had been and whatever he had been doing, it had suited both his health and his appearance. He had put on flesh, not much, but enough to give him greater dignity of carriage; and he had lost certain little mannerisms which had often annoyed his mother-in-law.

"So it is all right?" said Mary Johnson when he went to see her, and her heart beat thankfully.

"Yes, I'm a respectable member of society and shall go down to my grave as such." He was standing by the window looking out into the desolate garden and tapping his fingers lightly on the pane. "But it is dull—respectability."

"For a time, but that phase passes and after a time one gets to take the ordinary healthy interest in things." She knew. Had she not been through it all, step by step, just as he was doing?

"Well, I hope so." He seemed a little dubious, but she no longer thought of telling him whence she derived her certainty. Instead she began to question him about his wanderings, and he fenced with her lazily.

"Come over to-morrow," he said, "and you shall hear all about everything. I've brought back a curio or two, and the doctor has given permission for them to be inspected in Eva's room to-morrow."

But on the morrow Mrs. Johnson was prostrate with one of her attacks of pain; and Archie and Eva were consequently alone when the former's

trunks were unpacked, alone except for that negligible third, the baby.

They were wonderful trunks. Eva lying on the outside of her bed, watched her husband as he lifted treasure after treasure out of its wrappings, silk from China, porcelain and ivories from Japan, silver and Lucknow work from India, lace from Ceylon, carven gourds from the West Indies and a hundred other beautiful and precious objects.

"Oh Archie, where have you been, where did you get all these lovely, lovely things?"

Her husband handed her four napkin rings of plain thick ivory. "The Chinaman who sold me these nearly slipped in two thin ones," he said, "but I'd been told to watch him and I saw them in time. The beggars, they'll do you if they can. For all my care the fellow gave me a bad dollar among the change when I paid him."

"China, India, Italy, Jamaica," said Eva, "why you must have been round the world?"

"Just so," said he, "I've been—round the world." And sitting there among the piles of foreign-looking, foreign-scented articles, he began at the beginning and told her all that she wanted to know. He was not certain how he had spent the evening of the day upon which he had parted from her; but on the following morning he had presented himself at Bannerman's office. This man, after leaving college, had run through a fortune but was now making a successful business out of rather absurd

beginnings. He was small and alert-looking with that peculiar London constitution which allows a man to defy most of the so-called laws of health and be none the worse for it. When Flowerdew made his appearance, he was twisting about on his heel while he dictated a batch of letters, but when he saw that his visitor was an old college chum he dismissed his secretary and took on a holiday appearance.

"But I'm calling on the Labour Bureau, old man, and not on you," explained the newcomer.

"What you? Why? Isn't the school all right?"

"The school is, but I'm not," and he made a clean breast of his trouble.

"Let me think a minute," said Bannerman, and rocked himself on his chair for some time in silence. He looked up once as if appraising his companion; and finally, picking up a letter which was lying on the top of an orderly heap of papers, ran his eye down it.

"Set a thief to catch a thief," he observed genially. "D'ye know, I really believe this would be the thing for you," and he tossed the letter across. To Flowerdew's amazement it proved to be from a lawyer who was desirous of finding a suitable companion for some client who contemplated a trip round the world. He was averse to taking a doctor, but if a public school or university man could be persuaded to accompany him, the remuneration would be good.

"And that means?" queried Flowerdew.

"Drinks like a fish," said the other tersely.

"But——"

"I know, but let me tell you about him first. He's all right when he's sober, a very decent chap; but when he's drunk they say he's the devil and all. His family's about fed up with him I understand, and this is by way of giving him a last chance. The fellow's rolling in money, he's over twenty thousand a year and no end of a fine place down in Leicestershire."

"Well," said Flowerdew, "I should have thought this would have been about the last thing I ought to undertake. Good God, think of it, the pair of us!"

The other rubbed a shaven chin. "I don't know," he said. "You see you've had experience, you know when he'll be feeling bad and so forth. I should think if anybody could keep him off liquor it might be you."

"But I——"

"Example's better than precept. How about those helot johnnies?"

"There's something in that."

"You've always been a fastidious fellow and to see this chap making a beast of himself, ruining his health, losing his wife's affection, a gentleman too with an old name and any amount of tin oh, it ought to tell."

"It's a queer remedy for my disease, but I might try it. What terms?"

"Pretty much anything you like to ask. Shouldn't

be too modest, a job like this is a beastly fag and you were always a damn sight too conscientious. Now let's go and lunch."

A fortnight later Flowerdew and his charge were on a P. and O. steamer bound for Japan. During the first few days of their companionship Sir Andrew St. John gave proof of being the "very decent chap" that Bannerman had called him. He was scholar as well as gentleman, a courteous, broadly read, intelligent person, and before they reached Suez Flowerdew had a sincere liking for the man, a liking which held in spite of subsequent events. For St. John was one of those who are as if possessed by a devil, one who only picked himself out of the gutter of his vice to fall again. For six months, travelling restlessly on no preconcerted plan but bearing ever eastward St. John fled the craving that was in his own breast. His so-called secretary did what he could for the unfortunate man and during his lucid intervals St. John, recognising this, showered on him the spoils of travel; but when he was drinking he was as a wild beast unchained. There were ups and downs but on the whole the man grew steadily worse; and Flowerdew, too much occupied with his companion to think of himself, was only thankful when they reached Liverpool and he could hand him over to his family. Lady St. John begged him to continue with them for a time, but Archie excused himself. Then would he come back? Her husband liked him so

much and it would be such a comfort to have another man, besides the servants, in the house. Archie could not say, but if she would leave the offer open, he would write; and with that she was obliged to be content. But she sighed a little as she turned away. Why had it not been her fate to marry some such man as the self-contained young secretary? He looked strong as well as clever and strength, moral strength, had become to Lady St. John the one thing needful in a man.

Archie Flowerdew picked up a piece of white brocade and unrolled its shining breadth. "Look at the design of that," he said, "St. John gave it to me when we were at Shanghai. The beggar was always giving me things—when he was sober."

"You had a bad time, I am sure," remarked Eva sympathetically.

"Ah," said her husband with a grim touch in his voice, "but I never had a moment to myself and when I saw him going down and down, I—well I couldn't touch the beastly stuff. We had various adventures," he paused to look back, remembering how at a Chinese port he had lost sight of his charge and found him in an opium den, half dead. "In fact I was kept on the trot so much that I hadn't time to dwell on my own fancies."

"That was a good thing."

"The best possible."

"And now—what do you think of doing?"

"I told you of Lady St. John's offer."

"But that would mean separation?"

Flowerdew nodded.

"Oh, Archie, no, I couldn't stand it again." Her voice deepened and sank. "Oh my dear, I don't think I could have borne it a day longer. I knew that a time must come when my certainty that you would return would give way; and I felt it getting nearer and nearer, but I wouldn't see it, I wouldn't think of it. Some day however, I should have turned a corner and come face to face with it, and it would have been like death. You mustn't, oh you mustn't leave me again." It was not often that Eva, the self-controlled, expressed herself strongly and Archie was grateful to her for the little outburst.

"Then I must take up scholastic work again," he said presently.

His wife approved of the idea. "And why not here?"

"Here?"

"Mother talks of letting this house but I am sure she would rather that we had it and we could begin in a small way. Mary would send us her two boys and only the other day Connie Freeman was complaining that the nearest school was your old one at Eastborough and that that was too far away. I feel certain she would be delighted to have one nearer for her Jack and Roy. Yes, and there are others."

The new Archie was willing to begin in a small

way and build his house brick by brick. His large ambitions had toppled to a fall and now he was content to settle in Eastham. "But you must get well before we can decide," he said.

"I?" laughed Eva. "I'm perfectly well, it's only mother's old-fashioned notions that keep me here. And I'm so dreadfully interested, do let us talk it over."

And in the gathering dusk of the November afternoon they sat hand in hand like a couple of children and discussed the home that was to be, the home that should be founded upon love and sobriety and self-sacrifice.

CHAPTER XXIV

ARCHIE FLOWERDEW'S capacity for teaching was indubitable and Eastham presently came to acknowledge it. The Johnsons and Freemans sent their sons and were pleased with the result. Old friends of Eva, now married and with nurseries, found the new school a convenience. Flowerdew's methods were discussed with admiration and as a result he was presently able to move into a larger house. He chose one on the high ground beyond the station, a big gabled red-brick place of the kind that builders term artistic. Beyond its large garden, lay a broad and fairly level meadow and this was converted into playing-fields, while a depression at one end was enlarged and cemented into a swimming bath. Flowerdew thought himself lucky in finding so easily, a place that suited his requirements and he was the sort of man who gathered confidence from success. Before many years were over he had prepared a boy for Osborne College and got him in; while other of his pupils obtained public school scholarships. But his reputation was chiefly that of a man who was successful with boys of moderate intelligence; and as the majority, in spite of their mothers, are not particularly clever, he bade fair before long to have as many pupils as he wanted.

To Mrs. Smart, his success had followed as a matter of course upon her taking over the farm from Tamsin. She felt that the powers above were smiling upon her honest attempt to make amends, and though she felt so she was careful to walk delicately for in her secret heart she was still somewhat afraid. Her offence had been unintentional! To have so sinned and been so punished makes for wariness, and Mrs. Smart had long since been careful to send the opal, pearl, amethyst and big diamond, with the crushed settings, back to their late owner. Within, on the paper that wrapped the stones was inscribed in printed characters: "From the person who found them." Mrs. Smart was no friend to exaggeration. She had not taken the jewels, she had only found them and though it was evidently wrong to keep what you found, she knew that by the world at large the two actions were viewed very differently.

During the autumn that followed Willy's departure, she had been unusually self-absorbed. She missed him at every turn, and so missing him was continually reminded that his absence was due to her own greed of gain, of unearned money, of wealth to which she had no right. Eva absorbed in her new baby and new-found husband, hardly noticed her mother's silence and Mrs. Smart was left to her own bitter reflections. The fading months of that year were the most unhappy that she had known. She had very little to do, and after all, that

little was for herself alone, and seemed hardly worth the doing. She grew to spend more and more time with her hands in her lap, not thinking, but sunk in a sort of black depression. It was a good thing for her when Tamsin began to make demands upon her time, discussing the transfer of the farm and begging her to come over to Ashwater. About that time too, a letter from Willy reached her, a letter full of his new life and throbbing with joy. He had been so intensely glad to go that his mother loving him, could no longer look upon his absence as entirely a misfortune. If her loss were his gain, she must put up with it. The letter roused her from her abstraction, it told her where to write and it made her feel that her boy was happy. She began with renewed eagerness to make her preparations for leaving Eastham; and Christmas saw her established at the farm and as busy as farm folk ever are at that time of the year.

The years rolled quietly away, the Flowerdews moved into their larger house, and Mrs. Smart who had slipped into her new life as a hand slips into an old glove, and who worked for the love of the work as much as for what it brought, grew gently a little and a little older. At intervals she lifted the old desk in which her savings were deposited from its shelf in her wardrobe, reckoned the contents, and if there were enough, packed them into a flat brown parcel and sent them to Lady Dudley Bodger.

The slow mounting up of the sum saved had become the chief interest in her life, and having a private income more than sufficient for her wants, she was able to put by all that she made. She posted her parcels in London, each at a different office, and as package after package left her hands, as the years passed bringing only good fortune to those she loved, as Willy began to talk of coming home, her old cheeriness of outlook began to re-assert itself. It seemed enough for her that she should have work to do, Eva and her children for the summer holidays and Willy's letters; and she felt, in spite of what had happened, that she was really a happy and a lucky woman.

She stood one evening in March at her green-painted door, a look of unusual excitement on her face, for Willy was coming home. The narrow path to the gate was fringed with the dull purple of violets, the yellows of primroses and daffodils, flowers which bloomed year after year in the border, which had bloomed there when she was a child and which bloomed there now that her children's children had come about her. Mrs. Smart's cup was full to overflowing, for Willy after years of desultory wandering had at length found a niche into which he could fit. The question was whether he would consent to fill it. During an expedition among savage tribes upon which he had been induced to accompany a casual acquaintance, he had shown considerable talent for dealing with native

races, and this had been remarked on. The leader of the expedition, upon reaching home, had mentioned it in the right quarters and Willy had been offered a post upon the outskirts of the empire, a post which Colonel Smart was most anxious for him to accept. His mother, when the matter was explained to her felt that he had left little things for greater, but that the new Willy might be unfamiliar. She had tried once to point out the way in which he must walk, but this time she would not seek to influence him. He must choose and with what he chose, she would be satisfied.

"He will be a great man one of these days," asserted William Smart delightedly.

"Great?" said Mrs. Smart wistfully. "It makes him sound a long way off. I have never known any great people."

"But no man," smiled the Colonel, "is great to his mother."

She thought of this as she stood looking out. In the distance the white smoke clouds of his train were rolling out, prophesying his advent; and nearer the lambs were bleating in the hill pasture. She had taken Tamsin's advice and that spring the "two-three yowes" had each presented her with a couple of lambs, nice fat little fellows who were now nearly big enough to kill.

Mrs. Smart stood for some minutes in the doorway, her face very bright, her eyes full of a happy peace. The debt she owed was being paid, the

heavy hand of misfortune had been lifted from her children's shoulders and her conscience was at rest. In her bosom, buried beyond all hope of resurrection, lay the story of the treasure trove, of her lapse from the morality inculcated by civilisation, and of her strong endeavour to retrieve her position. Her eyes were resting upon a small laburnum tree by the gate, but she was not thinking of its promise of bloom, she was not looking at the soft grey velvet buds. Willy was coming, the smoke-clouds had disappeared and the train must be in Ashwater station. It would not be many minutes now before he came.

Round the corner of the house strolled two comfortably grubby little figures; and Jocelyn and Mary Flowerdew who, as Eva was expecting another baby, were staying at the farm, trotted up to their grandmother. She smiled at them approvingly. "Why what sturdy fat legs you have Jocelyn!" she said, as if she had never noticed it before.

"Mother says I've a great big 'normouse bone inside," replied the child gravely.

His grandmother gently pinched the members in question. "And some muscle, I think."

He stooped towards her confidentially. "And my bleed," he whispered.

Mrs. Smart smiled. "What have you been doing?" she asked.

"Susan took us to see the lambs but their mothers wouldn't let us go near them."

"Wouldn't they?" she used the sympathetic tone which, when addressed to children, means so little.

"No, the mother-lambs got up and baa-ed over the babies and licked them and when we went near they opened their mouths at us."

"And," remarked Mary in her treble voice, "I said 'zay'll bite you.'"

"Dear, dear, you see they don't know you yet."

"Why's you standin' there, Granny?" It was unusual for their grandmother to be idle even for a moment.

"I'm waiting for Uncle Willy. He is coming home to-day."

"Is he coming now?"

"Yes now, now at once, his train is here already and is walking along the roads toward us. We'll go down to the gate and see if he has turned the corner yet."

They ran before her down the path and through the gateway, their sudden appearance annoying and discomposing two grave black rooks who in a dignified manner were bowing before a third, and entreating her to choose between them. She, with an expressionless eye on each, had been standing motionless, and now walked slowly across to the other side of the road. The children were delighted. "Black pigeons!" they cried gleefully, as the birds, rising at their approach, sailed indignantly away. "Look at the black pigeons, Granny!"

But Mrs. Smart had neither eyes nor ears for them. A tall bearded man was turning the corner of the road and the flame-red of sunset threw the square-shouldered familiar figure into bold relief. "Willy," said the mother under her breath and stood looking at the new Willy, the Willy who had come back.

The man's eyes were turned eagerly towards the farm and even at that distance Mrs. Smart could see the difference in the bearing, the ease and decision of movement, the swiftness of the glance. The boy was gone—for ever, but she could love the man who had come back.

"Willy!" she cried and stepped beyond the gate, and in a moment as it seemed, he had cleared the space between them.

"Oh Mother, Mother," he cried, his arms about her, "but it is good to see you again."

THE END

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